



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

THE DEATH OF JACOB  
NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS IN GENESIS 47.28-50.26

BY  
KERRY D. LEE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
2013



## ABSTRACT

---

Regarding the structural logic behind Jacob's death-bed story (Gen 47.28-50.26), biblical scholars historically have seen its enigmatic features as evidence of diachronic development. Those who treat it as an intentionally composed whole typically either simply assume that intention or else argue for it using only basic logical structures (chiasm, parallel). The story's composition is better explained, however, through the lens of conventional structures, especially that of a Hebrew death-bed type-scene. In the first chapter I overview approaches to the passage in biblical scholarship and evaluate recent synchronic approaches. Structuralist readings of other biblical texts are considered and mostly dismissed as a precedent, though Propp's method is similar. I then state my reasons for beginning with 47.28, rather than 47.27. In chapter two, I investigate the first of the four Episodes that make up Jacob's death-bed story: 47.28-31. Specific issues addressed include: evidence of competing chronologies, phrasal similarities with the chosen-line genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, and the characterization of Joseph as a Worthy Successor, one of four tale-roles taken by characters in death-bed stories. Chapter three deals with 48.1-22, giving special attention to the similarity of verses 3-12 to covenant-initiation forms, the issue of adoption, the conventional characterization of Joseph and his sons as Worthy Successors, and the grammar of verses 13-20. In chapter four I focus on the climactic aspects of the language of verse 28 and the characterization of all twelve sons as Worthy Co-Successors. Chapter five treats the Preparation and Testament sections (49.29-33) of the fourth and final Episode. Certain words and phrases are best understood in a legal register. In chapter six I turn to the extended conclusion of the fourth Episode, or the Epilogue, which encompasses the three short stories in 50.1-26. All three deal with conventional concerns typically addressed in death-bed stories. Furthermore, 50.22-26 is a conventional death-bed story in its own right. This investigation of conventional structures in Jacob's death-bed story opens up new and more objective ways of understanding long-recognized problems in the passage as intentional elements, regardless of the process of the text's composition and transmission.



I, Kerry D. Lee, declare that I have written this thesis, that it is entirely my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Abbreviations .....	xi
1 The Study of Conventions in Genesis 47–50 .....	1
1.0 Setting the Stage .....	1
1.1 The Scholarly Context .....	5
1.1.1 Biblical Studies .....	5
1.1.2 The Strengths and Weaknesses of Synchronic Approaches ....	14
1.1.3 Literary Criticism, Folklore, and Vladimir Propp .....	17
1.1.4 Similarities and Differences With Propp .....	21
1.1.5 Summary .....	24
1.2 The Starting Point for Jacob’s Death-Bed Story .....	25
1.3 The Plan for What Follows .....	29
1.3.1 Death-Bed Story Episodes .....	29
1.3.2 Preview of the Following Chapters .....	31
1.4 Conclusion .....	34
2 The Burial Request to Joseph .....	35
2.0 Text and Preliminary Remarks .....	35
2.1 The Preparation (Genesis 47.28–29a) .....	36
2.2 The Testament (Genesis 47.29b–31a) .....	45
2.2.1 Joseph as Worthy Successor .....	48
2.3 The Denouement (Genesis 47.31b) .....	54
2.4 Conclusion .....	61
3 The Blessing of Joseph .....	63
3.0 Text and Preliminary Remarks .....	63
3.1 The Preparation (Genesis 48.1–2) .....	68
3.1.1 ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ .....	74
3.2 Testament A: The Adoption (Genesis 48.3–12) .....	81
3.2.1 An Historical Prologue .....	82
3.2.2 Genesis 48.3–7 Among the Priestly Promise Texts .....	85
3.2.2.1 Priestly Texts? .....	86
3.2.2.2 The Motifs of the <i>El-Šadday</i> Promise Texts .....	89
3.2.3 The Intention to Adopt and its Justification .....	94
3.2.4 The Adoption (Genesis 48.8–12) .....	102



3.2.4.1	The Confirming Dialogue (Genesis 48.8–9a)	104
3.2.4.2	The Confirming Event (Genesis 48.9b–12)	114
3.2.4.3	Adoption in Ancient Israel	124
3.2.5	The Worthy Successor and the Portrayal of Joseph's Sons	132
3.2.6	Summary of 3.2	134
3.3	Testament B: The Blessing of Joseph and His Sons (Genesis 48.13–20)	135
3.3.1	The Integrity of Genesis 48.15–16	138
3.3.2	The Two Blessings of Genesis 48.15–16 and 48.20	141
3.4	Testament C: The Individual Blessing of Joseph (Genesis 48.21–22)	144
3.5	Conclusion	149
4	The Blessing of the Twelve	151
4.0	Text and Preliminary Remarks	151
4.1	The Summoning of the Twelve (Genesis 49.1a)	152
4.2	Genesis 49.28 as a Climax and Changes in Narrative Tempo	156
4.3	The Characterization of the Twelve as Worthy Successors	160
4.4	Conclusion	165
5	The Burial Request to the Twelve	167
5.0	Text and Preliminary Remarks	167
5.1	The Preparation (Genesis 49.29a)	169
5.2	The Testament (Genesis 49.29b–32)	171
5.3	The Denouement (Genesis 49.33)	174
5.4	Conclusion	177
6	The Epilogue	179
6.0	Text and Preliminary Remarks	179
6.1	Death-Bed Epilogues	181
6.2	Jacob's Burial (50.1–14)	184
6.3	The Survival of Jacob's Legacy (50.15–21)	194
6.4	Joseph's Death as Epilogue (50.22–26)	197
6.5	Joseph's Death as Conventional Death-Bed Story	200
6.5.1	The Preparation (50.22–23)	200
6.5.1.1	The Meaning of ילדו על-ברכי	203
6.5.2	The Testament (50.24–25)	213
6.5.3	The Denouement (50.26)	218
6.6	Conclusion	221
7	Conclusion	223
7.0	Summary	223
7.1	Synthesis	227
	Bibliography	231

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

There are so many people that have contributed to my life and success over the last four years that it would be impossible to name them all. Some of the most significant include:

\* My adviser, Hans Barstad, whose wise guidance and restraint have been absolutely perfect for me and my style of learning and researching (though it is probable that my penchant for radically developing or changing an idea in between our meetings may not have been so perfect a fit for his overall stress level);

\* The many wonderful people of Buccleuch Free Church who have supported my family and me during very difficult times and who, through their Christ-like love, have shown me that the Church can actually be what it was created to be;

\* My family in the USA, who have graciously loaned me out for a few years;

\* Most of all, my wife, Lara, who has been, whether she meant to or not, the epitomic Proverbs 31 woman – a far greater woman than I deserve.

I can only hope that I shall, as my career progresses, prove worthy of what these and others have invested in my life.

One final shout out goes to my son, Peter, who is still too young to read this (but he's getting close!). Peter was born here in Edinburgh not too long after we arrived – four months early! Despite his ill-advised overeagerness to join us outside the womb, not only did he survive, he has surpassed everyone's expectations and has grown into the cleverest, handsomest, funniest, and most loving little boy I've ever known.

Whenever you learn enough to be able to read this, know, Peter, that you are the joy of my life, and even though you didn't realize it, you have kept me going through some very difficult times.



## ABBREVIATIONS

---

The following abbreviations are taken, where possible, from Patrick H. Alexander and others, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). Where an abbreviation is lacking there, I have supplemented with abbreviations drawn from Siegfried M. Schwertner, *IATG2. Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete: Zeitschriften, Serien, Lexika, Quellenwerke mit bibliographischen Angaben*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992). Where an abbreviation was still lacking, I usually leave a series or journal unabbreviated. In rare cases, I have used obvious abbreviations not found in either of the lists, or have altered a given abbreviation to fit with newer series or journals.

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed., <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 vols (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	Ancient Near East/Ancient Near Eastern
ANET	Pritchard, James B., ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 1st edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)
Arab.	Arabic
ASOR	The American Schools of Oriental Research
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBE	Bible in Basic English
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> , reprinted from 1906 edn (Oxford, 1906; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997)
BHS	Kittel, Rudolf, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Peter Rüger, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , 4th emend. edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990)
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BiLiSe	Bible and Literature Series
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

<i>CA</i>	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
<i>CAD</i>	Roth, Martha T., Robert D. Biggs, John A. Brinkman, Miguel Civil, Walter Farber, Erica Reiner, and others, eds., <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> , 21 vols (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2010)
<i>CBC</i>	Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CeB</i>	The Century Bible
<i>COS</i>	Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds, <i>Archival Documents from the Biblical World</i> , The Context of Scripture: Canonical, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1996)
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DCH</i>	Clines, David J. A., and John Elwode, eds., <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , 8 vols (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2008)
<i>DSB</i>	Daily Study Bible
<i>E</i>	The Elohist
<i>ECC</i>	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>FAT</i>	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FB</i>	Forschung zur Bibel
<i>FOTL</i>	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>GKC</i>	Gesenius, H. F. W., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. by E. Kautzsch, trans. by A.E. Cowley, 2nd Eng. edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963)
<i>Gr.</i>	The Greek translation as found in Rahlfs, Alfred, ed., <i>Septuaginta: id est, Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes</i> , 9th edn (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1981)
<i>HALOT</i>	Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 5 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999)
<i>HAT</i>	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>Hermes</i>	Hermes: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie
<i>HKAT</i>	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HSAT</i>	Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HSS</i>	Harvard Semitic Series
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>IBHS</i>	Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O'Connor, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IOS</i>	Israel Oriental Society
<i>ITC</i>	International Theological Commentary
<i>J</i>	The Yahwist
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBL.MS	JBL Monograph Series
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>The Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
Joüon	Joüon, Paul, and Takamitsu Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> , SubBi, 27, 2nd reprint of 2nd edn with corrections, (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009)
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JPSTC	JPS Torah Commentary
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal for Semitics</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KEH	Kurzgefaßtes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCeB	New Century Bible Commentary
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBL	Orientalia et Biblica Lovaniensia
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OrAnt</i>	<i>Oriens Antiquus</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën/Old Testament Studies (Brill)
OTSt	Old Testament Studies (T&T Clark)
P	The Priestly source/editor
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
R	The final Redactor in classical expressions of the Documentary Hypothesis
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RThom</i>	<i>Revue Thomiste</i>
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
Sam.	Gall, August Freiherrn von, <i>Der Hebräische Pentateuch Der Samaritaner</i> , The McMaster Collection, Paper 163 (Giessen:

	Töpelmann, 1918) < <a href="http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/mcmastercollection/163">http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/mcmastercollection/163</a> >
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBET	Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SemeiaSup	Semeia Supplements
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SHAW.PH	Sitzungsberichte der heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch- historische Klasse
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
Syr.	Syriac (unless noted otherwise, as used in <i>BHS</i> critical apparatus, meaning a consensus between codex Ambrosianus (Ceriani, A. M., ed., 1876) and versio Syriaca secundum polyglottam Londinensem B. Waltonii (1654))
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
Tg(s)	Targum(s)
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Helmer Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–)
<i>THAT</i>	Jenni, Ernst, and Claus Westermann, eds., <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> , 2 vols (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1971–1976)
<i>Tg. Ps.-J</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
Vulg.	Vulgate (unless otherwise noted, as used in <i>BHS</i> critical apparatus, meaning Hetzenauer, Michael, ed., <i>Biblia Sacra Vulgatae editionis</i> , 2nd edn (1922))
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

# 1 THE STUDY OF CONVENTIONS IN GENESIS 47–50

---

## 1.0 SETTING THE STAGE

Regarding the rationale for the compositional structure of Jacob's death-bed story at the end of Genesis (and, indeed, of any text) there are essentially three options, regardless of the origins of its constituent parts: (1) the materials have been assembled thematically with little to no attention to timeline continuity or other harmonization of details; (2) the composition is more or less harmonized, but the arrangement of it is due to nothing other than the needs of the immediate context and the whims of the author; (3) the materials are written/edited and arranged in accordance with conventions.<sup>1</sup> All three of these options are compatible with

---

<sup>1</sup> Baldick's definition of convention is succinct and clear: 'an established practice—whether in technique, style, structure, or subject—matter—commonly adopted in literary works by customary and implicit agreement or precedent rather than by natural necessity.' Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 69. This definition leaves quite a lot of room for specification and classification. I have yet, however, to come across a satisfactorily comprehensive set of analytical tools for the study of conventions, either in biblical or literary studies. In Hebrew Bible scholarship, the closest thing to such a system are the taxonomies of repetitive structuring of Alter (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 1983), esp. pp. 118–19) and Sternberg (Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 365–440 (365–66)). Both of these taxonomies are helpful, especially within their respective works. For general use outside of their individual settings, however, they fall short. Sternberg's four levels (linguistics—that is, phonology, morphology, and syntax—plot, theme, and genre) are neither specific nor comprehensive enough (nor does the rest of the chapter address my concerns in this regard). This is probably because Sternberg's focus is more especially on repetition, which is not identical to convention (conventions are a kind of repetition, but they are repetitions which do not necessarily find an echo within the given piece of literature). His immense chapter does provide quite a lot of tools for analysing intra-textual repetition. Alter's five-fold scale of repetitive structuring is somewhat more helpful, but here, too, the focus is primarily on repetition within a work of literature, at least in his categories of *Leitwort*, motif, theme, and sequence of actions. These four categories encompass Sternberg's levels (except that of genre) and are more descriptive. The fifth category, type-scene, does



diachronic theories of the story's composition, though the latter two argue for caution and restraint in the perception of unevenness that must be the foundation of any diachronic theory. These latter two differ from each other in that the former treats the text as highly autonomous, while the latter treats the text as a part of a body of texts that share in a common cultural and linguistic tradition.

Of the three options, the first essentially describes the historical-critical method as it has typically been practised in biblical scholarship, while the second describes the typical approach of those emphasizing the final form. Diachronic methods begin from the perception of inexplicable features of the final form, or unevenness, and seek an explanation in the compositional process. But such hypotheses are only valid if the scholar perceiving the unevenness is a competent reader.<sup>2</sup> The final form approach often begins with a (not necessarily unreasonable) presupposition that the final form very likely makes sense to a competent reader.<sup>3</sup>

---

not truly belong in this scale, since its echo is not necessarily to be found within the given work of literature; or if it does, so also do many other literary phenomena (other conventions like stock characters, thematic spaces, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> This principle is recognized, for example, by Polzin when he speaks of an 'operational priority' of synchronic study. Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 5–7. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. xxv–xxvi, aptly explains the logical/operational priority of the literary study of texts.

<sup>3</sup> I use the terms competent reader and implied reader synonymously, though I know there is a great deal of technical and very specific scholarly discussion over the meaning and existence of this narrative agent sitting somewhere between the real reader and the narrative itself. Regarding narrative agents, I tend to be a minimalist along the lines of Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), esp. pp. 130–154. I understand readerly competence to be the knowledge of a text, both of its world and of its features, necessary to decode it. Decoding a text not only involves mastery of its language (*langue* and *parole*) but also of its presupposed images, norms, and values. These unspoken characteristics are what enable us to perceive conversational implicature in a text and, more specifically, the flouting of it, as in the case of irony. This set of mental furniture, like a library of functions in computer programming, are preset meaning creators, and they are what constitute the role of the implied reader which, in my view, is not one single reading, but rather a range of plausible readings. Here, I may be using the term differently from Wolfgang Iser, to whom the term 'implied reader' is originally attributed. He writes, 'The implied reader refers to the reader-role marked out in the text and not a typology of a possible reader' (my translation). His meaning here, if I understand him correctly, is that the text must be the basis for our understanding of the implied reader, not a presumed historical matrix external to the text. This

Unfortunately, the way scholars go about trying to demonstrate final form coherence often depends heavily on basic logical structures, like parallels and chiasma. Logical structures are important, but they are also highly subjective, since their simplicity makes them more prone to abuse by an imaginative reader (much like allegory).<sup>4</sup>

The third approach seeks more complex compositional patterns by comparing large numbers of texts for common underlying structures.<sup>5</sup> Conventional structures

---

distinction is, perhaps, easier to maintain when one is dealing with contemporary novels, as was Iser, where a modern reader can presume to have a good deal more cultural continuity with the implied reader. In the case of ancient texts, however, whatever reader may be implied by the text is historically and culturally very different from the reader implied by a modern novel. Nevertheless, I am agreed with Iser that the search for the reader implied by the text must be concerned not so much with reconstructing the mind of the actual author (to whom we do not have direct access) or the presumed circumstances in which the text was written, but rather a readerly mindset discoverable within the text itself (to which we do have direct access). Wolfgang Iser, *Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), pp. 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), is a well-done work that catalogues many such logical structures. Walsh also notes (p. 13 (n. 1)) that much of the identification of reverse symmetrical structures (chiasm, concentricism) in biblical studies has not been rigorously thought through. See also Shimon Bar-Efrat, ‘Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative’, *VT*, 30 (1980), 154–73, for a discussion of good and bad practices in the identification of different kinds of structure, including chiasm and concentricism (esp. p. 172). Notably, Bar-Efrat’s discussion of structure on ‘the level of the narrative world’ encompasses conventional plot-structures (154–73, pp. 163–68), though most of his article is concerned with good practice in analysing logical structures.

<sup>5</sup> An appreciation for the hermeneutical circle is extremely important for the search for convention. Because convention is, by definition, implicit and not strictly necessary, an unguided non-native reader (which is any modern reader of the Hebrew Bible) can only perceive them by comparison and continual, experimental reading. Logical structures, on the other hand, can often be perceived even the first time through a text. In the background of my understanding is, especially, this passage by Paul Ricoeur:

Guess and validation are in a sense circularly related as subjective and objective approaches to the text. But this circle is not a vicious one. That would be the case if we were unable to escape the kind of ‘self-confirmability’ which, according to Hirsch, threatens the relation between guess and validation. But to the procedures of validation there also belong procedures of invalidation similar to the criteria of falsifiability proposed by Karl Popper in his *Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Here the role of falsification is played by the conflict between competing interpretations. An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation. There are criteria of relative superiority for resolving this conflict, which can easily be derived from the logic of subjective probability.

... [I]f it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text presents a limited field of possible constructions. The

have the advantage over basic logical structures in being more difficult to demonstrate and, therefore, more compelling as an argument for final form coherence. One can find examples of the third approach scattered throughout works that follow the first and second approaches, so the search for conventional structures is not unprecedented. It is, however, rare to find someone who performs an intentional and thorough search for convention as a biblical text's primary structural strategy, even when convention is consciously acknowledged. However, oral and written compositions of all sorts, sizes, and provenances utilize culture-specific conventional patterns and not just free-form composition.<sup>6</sup>

One has to wonder, then, why Jacob's death-bed story (and indeed most Hebrew narrative) has primarily been treated by final form scholars as a mostly autonomous text. This fact is especially surprising when comparison of Jacob's death-bed story with many other death-bed stories in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature very quickly reveals that Genesis 47.28–50.26<sup>7</sup> is not unique in its structure. Deeper study shows that not only is

---

logic of validation allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism. It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our immediate reach.

Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meanings* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 79. See also the useful discussions of the hermeneutical circle in John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), pp. 17–18; Luis Alonso Schökel and José María Bravo, *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, ed. by Brook W. R. Pearson, trans. by Liliana M. Rosa (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 78–79.

<sup>6</sup> Despite conceptual differences between folklore and (storytelling) literature, in many if not most senses the two can be analysed in the same ways. Archer Taylor broadly, but appropriately, defines folklore as anything passed down by tradition and literature as anything written. Archer Taylor, 'Folklore and the Student of Literature', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 206–18, discusses some of the issues arising from these broad definitions and from the varied kinds of relationships conceivable between folklore and literature so defined.

<sup>7</sup> For a justification of this selection, see section 1.2 below.

Jacob's death-bed story shaped in accordance with a conventional Hebrew death-bed type-scene, but it also can be productively compared with other conventional forms, both those specific to Genesis and those common to a larger number of texts. These conventions show that the one responsible for the final form of this complex of texts, regardless of the probable diversity of their origins, has intentionally and transformatively shaped his/her material.

## 1.1 THE SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

The kind of research I am describing is not without precedent. It exists at the intersection of two scholarly conversations. The first is biblical studies and, more specifically, the ways scholars have approached the composition of Jacob's death-bed narrative. The second is the history of the study of conventional plot structures in literary criticism, folklore, and semiotics.

### 1.1.1 BIBLICAL STUDIES

Critical scholarship up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was primarily concerned with finding unevenness in Jacob's death-bed story (as in all the Pentateuch) thought to be traces of its constituent sources, especially the Documentary Hypothesis' P, R, and JE redaction. While some have thought it possible to extract the specific J and E strands,<sup>8</sup> most scholars concluded that the JE redaction was too well integrated at this point in the text, especially in chapter 48.

A characteristic example is the work of Gunkel. Gunkel found the JE redaction in 47.29–31; 48.1, 2, 7–22; 49.33aβ; 50.1–11, 14–26. This divides into two

---

<sup>8</sup> August Dillmann, *Die Genesis*, KEH, 4th edn (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882); Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. by Bernhard W. Anderson, Eng. trans. of 1st edn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972; repr. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte: Genèse chap.37–50 à la lumière des études égyptologiques récentes*, OBL, 3 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 359, discerns J and E with confidence in some parts, but acknowledges their inextricability in others.

smaller plot units between 50.1 and 2 (the last will of Jacob and Jacob's burial/the conclusion of the Joseph story). Genesis 49.1b–28a he attributes to his second J source, with R contributing some parts of verses 1 and 28. To P Gunkel attributes 47.28; 48.3–6; 49.1a, 28b–33a; 50.12–13.<sup>9</sup> While there are a number of points where other scholars differ in details (particularly with regard to Gunkel's sub-division of J), Gunkel's analysis is not very different from most such analyses up until the ascendancy of tradition-critical methods.<sup>10</sup> Typically, source-critical analyses of Jacob's death-narrative go hand-in-hand with a low esteem of the rationale behind the work of the final redactor and an effort to get back to the most primitive and pristine form of the text. Where Gunkel was an innovator in his time was in the application of ideas borrowed from folkloristics to biblical texts. Among folklorists of Gunkel's time and after, conventional structure in folklore was often thought to be spoiled or distorted by the transmission and writing process. Based on an assumption that similar tales were variants of an original, the so-called 'Finnish School' sought to gather similar tales and to reconstruct from them an original form

---

<sup>9</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, HKAT, 1, 1st edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). Gunkel is certainly not the first to divide the text in this way, nor was his precise division ever the standard in every facet. His division of J into two pre-J sources has not been widely followed. His contemporaries, Procksch and Skinner, often attribute to J and E what Gunkel attributes to two different layers in J (as in Gen 24, for example). I have singled out Gunkel in part because of his prominence in subsequent scholarly discussion. Otto Procksch, *Die Genesis: Übersetzt und erklärt*, KAT, 1, 3rd edn (Leipzig: A. Deichersche, 1924); John Skinner, *Genesis*, ICC, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930).

<sup>10</sup> The secondary literature for Genesis is immense and of a long history, and I have not, unfortunately, been able to consult even the majority of it. Because I have interest in showing that my precise approach is, in fact, new rather than just forgotten or overlooked, and because I often find that the older scholars have read their texts much more carefully than many more recent ones, I have attempted to consult the most important and representative works in this corpus (as evidence by the commonness of other scholars' citations) going back to the late 19th century. Of literature from the last 30 years or so I have been less selective. Where I was able, and where time has permitted, I have consulted works in their original languages, even when that meant I was working with something other than the latest edition (Gunkel's commentary is a case in point; I have consulted the German 1st edition that was at hand rather than the English translation of a later edition).

of that tale.<sup>11</sup> Biblical scholars, and Gunkel specifically, shared in this bias and in this effort. Little effort, therefore was made to investigate whether or how the different diachronic units work together to tell a single story, since the search for legitimate conventional structures in extant forms was felt to be futile. Genesis 47–50, rather, consists of several stories with only a thinly disguised attempt to force them into a single story.<sup>12</sup>

Gradually, the Documentary Hypothesis' categories proved to be insufficient to describe the probable complexities in the composition of Genesis, particularly in chapters 37–50 (with some exceptions), otherwise known as the Joseph novella. In an attempt to account for the unity implied by the unusually long overarching plot (or, in other words, its decidedly not episodic nature), analysis of the Joseph story began to develop its own set of categories and hypotheses, sometimes integrated with the Documentary Hypothesis, sometimes not. While a degree of intentionality was allowed in the final shape of the death-bed narrative, overall it was still not viewed as an organically constructed whole.

One of the most well-known of these studies is that of Redford. Using essentially the same techniques as classical source-criticism,<sup>13</sup> Redford discerns in the Joseph novella an original Reuben layer (characterized by the prominence of Reuben as the older brother figure, among other things), a later Judah layer, a set of

---

<sup>11</sup> See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. by Louis A. Wagner, trans. by Laurence Scott, American Folklore Society of Bibliographical and Special Series, 9, 2nd rev. edn (American Folklore Society and Indiana University Press, 1968; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 8–9; Pamela J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative*, BiLeSe (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), pp. 20–23.

<sup>12</sup> A pure source-critical approach is fundamentally intact as late as Lothar Ruppert, *Die Josephserzählung der Genesis: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Pentateuchquellen*, SANT, 11 (München: Kösel, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> Especially in early tradition-critical work, it is often difficult to see how it differs from source-criticism methodologically. Rendtorff rightly criticizes the dependence of the tradition-critics of his day on the Documentary Hypothesis categories. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup, 89 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

later additions, and finally the ‘Genesis editor’, who made use of other materials (e.g. the Documentary Hypothesis sources). His analysis of 47.28–50.26 is rather simple: Genesis 47.29–31 and 50.1–6, 15–21 belong to the Judah expansion, the rest to the Genesis editor.<sup>14</sup> This means that much of what had been considered a part of the JE redaction, or simply J, was rather originally something else altogether. This does not, however, mean that the final form of the death narrative is more coherent or organically arranged. Rather, much of what the Genesis editor adds is, according to Redford:

a collection of odds and ends drawn from diverse sources ... and included here in a desperate effort, one feels, to tie up loose ends before Jacob dies. With chapter 49 it ruptures the smooth flow of the simple death scene in which the aged Israel, after eliciting from his son the promise to take his corpse back to Palestine for burial (47:29–30), falls lifelessly in a seeming act of obeisance, while Joseph weeps uncontrollably (50:1). This innocuous little vignette has now been distended beyond belief by a host of improbables and mutual inconsistencies.<sup>15</sup>

Despite some methodological differences, Redford’s evaluation of the artistry of the final form is essentially consistent with those of the pure source-critics. One of the key redundancies in the overall death-bed story for Redford (even more explicitly for Blum<sup>16</sup>) is the perception of two death reports (47.31 and 49.33). For both Redford and Blum, because Genesis 48 follows a death report, it is a radical shift in the flow of the narrative.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Though his categories are different, this division of the text and the relative ages of the traditions are also largely maintained by Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, WMANT, 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984), pp. 250–54.

<sup>15</sup> D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, VTSup, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Blum, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> In contrast with Redford and with greater reliance on the traditional Documentary Hypothesis categories, Schmitt argues for an original ‘Judah’ form of the Joseph story, a subsequent Elohist ‘Reuben’ redaction, and an even later Yahwistic redaction (Schmitt argues that Documentary Hypothesis’ J is later than E). Schmitt understands the earliest two layers to be closely interwoven throughout most of Jacob’s death-bed story, with almost only those segments traditionally attributed to P being later. One logical conclusion of Schmitt’s analysis over against Redford’s would be a greater appreciation for the death-bed story as an organic whole, since both of the earliest layers run the full length of the story, but this is not Schmitt’s purpose. Hans-Christoph Schmitt, *Die Nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte: Ein Beitrag Zur Neuesten Pentateuchkritik*, BZAW, 154 (Berlin: De Gruyter,

A move toward an appreciation for compositional intent and conventional structures can be seen in Coats' form-critical study of Genesis.<sup>18</sup> His work focuses primarily on identifying the genre units in the text rather than the manner of their joining. Because of this, Coats perceives an underlying unity and structure to the final form of Jacob's death-bed story (understood as 47.28–50.14) despite some roughness in the narrative. In fact, Coats observes that the death report functions as a 'framework narrative' into which different kinds of material can be inserted. The weaknesses in Coats' study are its reliance on etic genre categories, the assumption that these categories are alternatives to one another (i.e. a 'novella' and a 'report' are categories of the same order), and the brevity of his study. Nevertheless, Coats' appreciation for the logic behind the final form stands out starkly among contemporary and previous studies.

Like Coats, Westermann's tradition-critical analysis recognizes a thematic, if not a literary, unity in 47.29–50.14.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, the story is made up of multiple self-contained units. These units are originally independent traditions that have been stitched together but which, even in their present setting, do not completely coordinate with one another. The contribution of P (49.1a, 28b–33; 50.12–13) is the Jacob story's conclusion, while that of the Joseph story is found in 50.1–11, 14. All of this has been brought together by the final redactor, but not without contradictions and tensions. Westermann only perceives one death report in the story, but there is still a tendency to read the flow of narrative time as uneven and jerky.

---

1980). Aspects of this approach play a significant role in the diachronic segments of Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context*, OTS, 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> George W. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, FOTL, 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, BKAT, I, 3 vols. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974–1982), III (1982).



As long as scholars have been investigating the compositional history of Genesis, some have been arguing for the unity of the final form.<sup>20</sup> More recently (especially since the 1960s), a host of scholars, utilizing the methods of literary criticism (with varying degrees of skill and effectiveness), have published commentaries and other scholarly work with special focus on the final form of the text of Genesis. Many of these commentaries, however, assume the unity of Jacob's death-bed narrative without really arguing for it based on features of the narrative. Consequently, one finds a wide variety of divisions of the text into macro-structural plot units.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, very few of these make extensive use of literary-critical concepts (like conventions) or methods (on the use of structural methods, see section 1.1.3).

Among commentaries that focus especially on the final form, Wenham's stands out. Unlike most others, Wenham bases his unit subdivision (48.1–50.26) on an awareness of conventional plot structuring, noting the concept of a death-bed

---

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to read Hupfeld's account of the scholarly debate in 1853 and to see that the people and circumstances of the scholarly world were not really all that different from more recent times. He expresses his concern that certain methodological problems among critical treatments of biblical texts had, in his time, given the conservatives fuel for their arguments against diachronic hypotheses. Hermann Hupfeld, *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (Berlin: Weigandt und Grieben, 1853), pp. 1–6. A few anti-Documentary Hypothesis examples from the first half of the 20th century are: Eduard König, *Die Genesis: Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erklärt*, 1st edn (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1919); Paul Heinisch, *Das Buch Genesis: Übersetzt und erklärt*, HSAT, 1 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1930); H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (The Wartburg Press, 1942; London: Evangelical Press, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Examples include: 47.28–49.28 (David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 323); 48.1–49.28 (Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis*, NAC, 1B, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996–2005), II (2005), 863; this is based on the theme 'blessing'; he notes the problems of diachronic division briefly and puts 48.1–49.28 and 49.29–50.14 in parallel subheadings of the same order); 46.28–50.26 (Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001) pp. 579–628); 46.1–50.26 (Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2004), pp. 260–76); Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, NICOT, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–1995), II (1995), 621–712, divides the story into three units of equal strength: 47.27–48.22; 49.1–33; 50.1–26. These are also equal in strength to 46.1–34 and 47.1–26.

type-scene at multiple points in his commentary.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Wenham's use of literary-critical tools is more full-featured than that of most other synchronically-oriented commentators. But despite Wenham's use of the concept of conventional plot-structures, his understanding of the death-bed story is limited: 'When a patriarch is about to die, he summons his nearest male relatives and blesses them' (II, 459). Part of the problem is that the body of texts from which Wenham draws his understanding of the death-bed type-scene is limited to Genesis (chapters 24, 27, 47–49, and 50.22–26). Once these scenes are compared with examples of the type-scene from outside Genesis, however, Wenham's succinct description proves insufficient. What is needed is a detailed study of the literary phenomenon (a death-bed type-scene) that Wenham and others<sup>23</sup> have observed with an express understanding that a convention like this likely (and in fact) does manifest outside of Genesis, as well.

An important work from the last 15 years concerned with Jacob's death narrative is Raymond de Hoop's *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context*. While de Hoop's book is primarily concerned with the oracular poetry in Genesis 49.2–27, de Hoop's method involves both diachronic and synchronic analyses of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, WBC, 2, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word Books, 1987–1994), II (1994), 452–93 (esp. p. 459). Other good examples include J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50*, ITC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 182, who bases his unit (47.27–49.33) on a comparison with Gen 5 and 11 genealogies (a comparison I also make in chapter 2), and Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 372. Arnold's commentary is intentionally arranged around the canonical chapter structure, but his understanding of the shape of the story runs from 47.28–50.14. Also to be noted is Matthews, II, 865–69, who discusses the structure of Jacob's death narrative in some detail and notes a kind of running storyline from 47.28–50.14. His commentary's subdivision of the text, however, is not fully consistent with this observation.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 68; Karlheinz H. Keukens, 'Der irreguläre Sterbesegen Isaaks: Bemerkungen zur Interpretation von Genesis 27:1–45', *BN*, 19 (1982), 43–56. Keukens makes a number of very interesting and astute observations that anticipate some of what I do in the following chapters. Keukens' concern, however, is to contrast Gen 27 with a standard death-bed blessing custom, the correct performance of which he asserts is critical if the blessing is to be valid. His arguments are based on a too rigid an understanding of the death-bed blessing form and too small a comparative corpus. Furthermore, the historical conclusions he gleans from the study are problematic.

surrounding narratives, specifically 47.27–49.33. De Hoop argues that this unit is properly divided into four sub-units: 47.27–31; 48.1–22; 49.1–28; 49.29–33.<sup>24</sup> These four sub-units are arranged chiastically. His arguments for this structure are largely based on opening formulae. While I agree with de Hoop to this extent, these arguments are not sufficient, in my opinion. Opening formulae are in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, as are their significances. Fortunately, as I shall demonstrate, other features of the text support and enhance this division of the story. The present importance of de Hoop's position on the form of the story is that it shows a developed recognition of final form logic in Jacob's death-bed story. Furthermore, de Hoop's fourth chapter, dedicated to a synchronic reading of the story, successfully argues on a number of points that the final form works as an organic whole with minimal unevenness, and without undue resort to basic logical structures.

Two other scholars are worth mentioning because their approaches are comparable in different ways to mine, but they have not dealt directly with my text. The first, whose work is difficult to classify, is Robert Longacre.<sup>25</sup> Longacre engages in a detailed structural analysis of the plot of Genesis 37–50 in an attempt to illuminate the boundaries between supposed Joseph material and *Toledot Jacob* material (in some ways a tradition-critical effort) (p. 23). His analysis concludes that the Joseph story ends with Genesis 48.22. In his view, the Joseph story has been used as the flesh and blood of the skeletal *Toledot Jacob* (which includes Genesis 49.1–50.26) in the final form of Genesis, and there is a kind of organic relationship between the two (pp. 54, 310). This approach to the text's history and structure predisposes Longacre against the possibility of seeing 47.28–50.26 as a fundamental story unit within Genesis 37–50. One wonders whether Longacre's conclusions

---

<sup>24</sup> De Hoop, pp. 317–18; see also Westermann, III, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

might not have been different if he had not begun with the assumption of a distinction between *Toledot Jacob* and the Joseph story. Do the complexities of the plot of Genesis 37–50 truly require a diachronic explanation? Is a diachronic hypothesis even the most plausible of explanations? These questions go unasked, let alone unanswered. Furthermore, Longacre is not attempting a comparative study of texts to find conventional structures, but, as in most other studies of the Joseph story, he investigates the structure of the Joseph story as an autonomous text. Therefore, neither Longacre's goals, his methods, nor his presuppositions were suitable for the sort of investigation I have undertaken.

The second remaining scholar is Robert Culley.<sup>26</sup> Working from an inspiration not unlike that of Robert Alter,<sup>27</sup> Culley initiates the search for numerous conventional plot structures in biblical narrative. Despite some debatable diachronic assumptions, Culley's work is methodologically sound. It is limited at the same time, however, because of its brevity and lack of focus. The patterns he uncovers are good

---

<sup>26</sup> R. C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narratives*, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> Culley's methodological inspiration came from several field studies in oral epic and from Albert Lord's works, including *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). (The edition I have consulted is a 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary reprint from the year 2000.) Alter's direct inspiration in talking about type-scenes was Walter Arend, *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer*, Problemata, 7 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1933) (see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 67). Arend and Lord (a colleague of Milman Parry) represent two different points of origin for the study of type-scenes in Homeric scholarship. My understanding of the function and form of Hebrew narrative convention, especially type-scenes, owes a good deal to these and other significant works from Homeric studies including: Bernard Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Illiad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description*, Hermes, 21 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1968); M. N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974); Mark W. Edwards, 'Type-Scenes and Homeric Hospitality', *TAPA*, 105 (1975), 51–72; Mark W. Edwards, 'Convention and Individuality in Iliad 1', *HSCP*, 84 (1980), 1–28; J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Mark W. Edwards, 'Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene', *Oral Tradition*, 7 (1992), 284–330; Peter Gainsford, 'Formal Analysis of Recognition Scenes in the "Odyssey"', *JHS*, 123 (2003), 41–59. Much of the scholarly discussion in Homeric studies focuses on the role of conventional plot structures in orally transmitted epic, but where the conclusions of these works pertain to the literary rather than the historical or sociological they are equally applicable to written sources, in my opinion.

patterns, but they are also very basic. Each pattern would do well to have its own monograph with several more similar texts included in the comparison. Culley's analysis of any given pattern, in other words, is similar to the earliest stages of the present work. Moreover, Culley's patterns do not touch on Jacob's death-bed story.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, biblical scholars have not historically looked for conventional structuring in Jacob's death-bed story nor even considered its possibility as a rationale for the final form. The search for evidence of the story's compositional history took first priority. Among more recent exceptions to that rule, only Wenham has demonstrated an awareness of conventional death-bed plot structuring in it, though Coats and de Hoop have argued for the narrative unity of the final form on different literary bases.

### 1.1.2 THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF SYNCHRONIC APPROACHES

I have so far only mentioned but a few recent synchronic studies of Genesis. This is because, regardless of the overall high quality of many of these studies, they do not address conventional plot structures (or conventions at all, for that matter) in anything but at most a haphazard way. Sarna is among the most sensitive commentators of the last twenty-five years, and the recognition of a conventional structuring to Jacob's death-bed story would be very much at home in his commentary, but it does not appear.<sup>29</sup> Hamilton, in his NICOT commentary, often argues for the sense and unity of the final form, but he does so generally in a historical way.<sup>30</sup> In dealing with Jacob's death-bed story, he does not evidence any

---

<sup>28</sup> A more developed and thorough approach is found in R. C. Culley, *Themes and Variations*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), but Culley still does not cover death-bed patterns.

<sup>29</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> To illustrate, Hamilton's explanation for possibly contradictory details between the two creation accounts in Gen 1 and 2 is largely to try and reconcile the two stories on the level of *histoire*, to show

awareness of conventional structuring. Matthews' NAC commentary is an excellent example of the series and, next to Wenham's, perhaps the most useful conservative-critical commentary on Genesis in the last twenty years. His use of literary-critical concepts, however, is very limited, and his recognition of underlying structures is, therefore, uneven. He does not recognize Jacob's death-bed story (meaning anything approximating 47.28–50.26) as a significant plot unit. These three, with Wenham, are the four most significant synchronically-oriented commentaries of the last twenty-five years, and none except Wenham recognize in Jacob's death-bed story an example of a commonly occurring underlying structure. Other recent and less significant synchronically-oriented commentaries usually assume the unity of Jacob's death-bed story rather than argue for it.<sup>31</sup>

Where scholars have attempted to discern conventional forms, this effort has been hampered by problematic methodology. On the one hand there is a tendency among final-form analysts to attempt an analysis of a given text's form with recourse only to basic logical structures. Note, for example, the prominence of chiasmic structures in the work of Fokkerman,<sup>32</sup> Rendsburg,<sup>33</sup> and Cotter,<sup>34</sup> to name a few. Some chiasma, both macro- and micro-structural, are compelling. Many, if not most

---

how no contradiction exists in the reconstructed reality behind the text. He appeals to literary technique mainly to serve the more fundamental historical argument (1 (1990), 150–60). Hamilton is not unique in this particular effort, but this example aptly demonstrates Hamilton's overall approach to arguing for the sense and unity of the final form of Genesis.

<sup>31</sup> These commentaries are often not really the appropriate context for such research, being mid-level commentaries aimed at laypersons and ministers (though some surpass the limits of their genre, especially, in my opinion, Arnold). Examples of this group are Janzen; John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, NIBCOT, 1 (Peabody, MA; Milton Keynes, UK: Hendrickson and Paternoster, 2000); Waltke; Amos; Arnold; Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004). Even the commentary of Alter, whom we have largely to thank for term 'type-scene' in biblical studies, makes no attempt to identify and clarify conventional plot structures in the death-bed story of Jacob. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd edn (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), esp. pp. 93–104.

<sup>33</sup> Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

others, however, feel forced.<sup>35</sup> The chiasm is a valid formal logic and can be expected to occur in texts, but because the identification of it in a text is so dependent on the imagination and ingenuity of the analyst, it can very easily be abused.

On the other hand are those who come to a text with a very well-developed set of genres at hand, but who have not derived those genres primarily from the texts under consideration. The genres used by Coats are just this sort of thing.<sup>36</sup> In the first place, the basis on which these genres were originally recognized and defined is not consistent. Some genres are distinguished on the basis of content (the report), some form (the tale), some an indiscriminate blend of the two (the saga), and some simply an outstanding feature of the form like length (the novella). While the previous problem was one of imposing forms on a text, this problem is one of inconsistent classification systems. Coats' taxonomy of genres would have been more satisfying if it had been based on morphological or formal considerations primarily, or if it had been based on content exclusively.<sup>37</sup> Both kinds of categorization are valid and

---

<sup>34</sup> To be fair, Cotter's Berit Olam commentary is not overly dependent on the chiasm. He attempts in several places to present multiple structures for the same material, to show the dynamic nature of literary structure. My primary complaint about Cotter's work is that it does not look very far beyond chiasmic and parallel structural schemas. Overall, Cotter does not show an interest in complex conventional structures.

<sup>35</sup> While I appreciate Rendsburg's observations, some of which have opened up new pathways of interpretation for me, I find very few of his conclusions convincing. The chiasmic structure that Fokkema imposes on Gen 27.1–28.5 is interesting, but it is based on very broad features of the text as they are paraphrased by Fokkema. He may be right about the text, but a chiasm that depends for its recognizability on an analyst's paraphrase of the text's content is, in my opinion, on shaky ground. Rendsburg's chiasma, it must be admitted, are often more solidly based on multiple features of the text. It does appear to me, however, that he began with the presupposition that Genesis would consist of a series of chiasma and then found the evidence to support it, sometimes in an admittedly ingenious way.

<sup>36</sup> See esp. *Genesis*, pp. 3–10, for an introduction to the genres Coats uses.

<sup>37</sup> The same is true of, for example, Brodie's description (pp. 406–7) of Gen 49.1–27 as 'a synthesis of three literary types: the death-bed blessing (cf. Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau, chap. 27); the farewell address or last discourse (cf. Joshua's farewell, Josh. 23–24); and the tribal poem (cf. the Song of Moses, Deut. 32).' But these are three different categories of categories. The 'death-bed blessing' is a content-based category, and the 'tribal poem' is a genre-/content-based category, whereas Brodie's understanding of a 'farewell address' (compared as it is with Joshua 23–24) is more form-based. All three of Brodie's texts for comparison, Gen 27, Josh 23–24, and Deut 33, are

useful, but the indiscriminate conflation of the two leads to an illogical taxonomy—a categorization system that does not entail an ‘either-or’ is of limited value.<sup>38</sup> In my opinion, for the sort of work Coats’ was attempting to do, morphological analysis, or the study of the forms of similar tales, has to come before typological analysis, or the assigning of genre.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, scholars from the last thirty years who have focused on the final form of the text of Genesis either have not sufficiently considered the possibility of conventional structuring in Jacob’s death-bed story or have approached the idea of conventional patterning in a problematic way.

### 1.1.3 LITERARY CRITICISM, FOLKLORE, AND VLADIMIR PROPP

While biblical scholarship related to Genesis has, for the most part, not shown an interest in or even awareness of the idea of conventional structuring, the systematic analysis of conventional form has played an important part in structuralist literary criticism and folkloristics. It was not my intention to do a ‘structuralist’ analysis of Jacob’s death-bed story, though my goals and methods have some things in common

---

death-bed stories as I understand them.

<sup>38</sup> The same things are true of Coats’ more extensive work in this area *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, ed. by George W. Coats, JSOTSup, 35 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985). Coats makes a sound argument for the need for meta-data about a text for the purpose of readerly competence, but the book has no clear philosophy about what constitutes a genre or what are the relationships of genres. Coats begins to address this problem in his introduction when he lists four elements on the basis of which ‘One can conclude that a genre of literature in the OT has been identified adequately when [the elements] emerge as in some sense typical.’ These four elements are: 1) a typical structure; 2) a typical vocabulary; 3) a typical setting; 4) a typical function (pp. 11–14). Whereas element one pertains to form, elements two and four pertain to content. Element three pertains to the text’s *Sitz im Leben* (neither form nor content). While the actual application of these form-critical genre-classifications differs in quality from scholar to scholar and work to work, there is nevertheless a fundamental methodological problem in beginning with the term and working toward the text.

<sup>39</sup> This was precisely the critique Propp levelled against the work of the representatives of the Finnish school (pp. 3–16). On this point, see also Alan Dundes, ‘Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales’, in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 206–18 (pp. 206): ‘There can be no rigorous typology without prior morphology.’



with certain aspects of structuralism, especially with the work of Vladimir Propp.

Therefore, it is a reasonable context in which to look for some kind of corollary to my own work.

There have been numerous structural studies of biblical texts, but few of them provide anything like a direct precedent for the present work. For one thing, I have yet to find a specific structuralist study of Jacob's death-bed story. Secondly, structuralism is not a monolith, and one is forced to speak of kinds of structuralism. Milne generalizes (but accurately) that the majority of structuralist studies of biblical texts follow in the footsteps either of Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>40</sup> or A. J. Greimas.<sup>41</sup> One should also add at least Roland Barthes and Paul Ricoeur to this short list.<sup>42</sup> What this

---

<sup>40</sup> The work of Lévi-Strauss, a social-anthropologist, was centred primarily around myth and the way humans use myth to make sense of chaotic reality. He was thus concerned with deep or paradigmatic structures in myths and with human psychology as expressed in these structures. He was also concerned to have what he felt to be as pure a form of a myth as possible, meaning a pre-written oral form of a myth. The process of gathering and writing led, according to Lévi-Strauss, inevitably to distortions in the myth that made it less possible to uncover the deep structures. For this reason, he did not feel that his approach could be usefully applied to biblical myths. 'Réponses à quelques questions', *Esprit*, 31 (1963), 631–32.

<sup>41</sup> Greimas' work in narrative is perhaps best known for his efforts toward a universal 'grammar' of narrative, including his actantial model and the semiotic square. See esp. Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. by Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp. 196–221. Even though his concerns were more synchronic than those of Lévi-Strauss, texts are, nevertheless, highly autonomous in Greimas' approach, such that wide comparison of similar texts is unnecessary. Greimas' approach has perhaps been the single most influential one for structuralist biblical studies in the long run.

<sup>42</sup> Milne (pp. 35–66) identifies Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, John J. Collins, Paul Rigby, J. W. Rogerson, and Matthieu Casalis as biblical scholars whose structuralist work most closely resembles that of Lévi-Strauss. Those who are more akin to Greimas, according to Milne, include the scholars at CADIR (Centre pour l'analyse du discours religieux) and the collaboration between Daniel Patte and Judson F. Parker. According to Milne, the contributions of Robert Polzin and David Jobling are a somewhat eclectic mix of structuralist methods. Roland Barthes' essay 'La lutte avec l'ange: Analyse textuelle de Genèse 32.23–33', in *Analyse structural et exégèse biblique: Essais d'interprétation*, Bibliothèque théologique (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1971), pp. 27–39, has been very influential. A number of similar studies of the same passage essentially took their understanding of Propp from Barthes. See Wolfgang M. W. Roth, 'Structural Interpretations of "Jacob at the Jabbok" Gn 32:22–32', *BR*, 22 (1977), 51–62; Robert Couffignal, "'Jacob lutte au Jabbok". Approches nouvelles de Genèse, xxxii, 23–33', *RThom*, 4 (1975), 582–97; Xavier Durand, 'Le Combat de Jacob: Gn 32, 23–33', in *L'ancien Testament: approches et lectures*, ed. by A. Vanel, Le Point Théologique, 24 (Paris: Institut Catholique de Paris, 1977), pp. 99–115. Studies invoking Ricoeur include Wolfgang M. W. Roth, 'The Text Is the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis', in *Encounter with the Text*:

means practically is that these studies are concerned with a text's internal logic and the production of meaning via a set of primary binary oppositions. According to Calloud:

What we designate by the term 'structure' should not be identified with the 'plan' nor with the 'breaking down of the text in reading units' (paragraphs, verses, or lexies), nor again with the classification of semantic contents. The structural description implies the passing over from concrete statements, as manifested in the text in a specific language and style, to abstract units capable of being elements of a 'system.'<sup>43</sup>

A structural analysis of a text looks behind the concrete surface features to the system of meaning production that lies underneath. However, as Calloud also notes (p. 4), there are different kinds of underlying structures and different ways of getting to them. Thus the term 'structuralism' encompasses a range of methods and goals.

Within the broad category of literary structuralism, the scholar whose work I find to be most similar to my own is Vladimir Propp. Propp could be considered either a formalist, a structuralist, or neither, because his work is highly original and very different from the work of other Russian formalists and other structuralists.<sup>44</sup> What unites Propp with the structuralists is the apparent influence of Saussure on his work.<sup>45</sup> Propp's strength, seen in contrast with other folklorists of his time,<sup>46</sup> is his attention to form as the basis of categorization for folktales rather than content. His

---

*Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. by Martin J. Buss, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 103–16.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Calloud, *Structural Analysis of Narrative*, trans. by Daniel Patte, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Though Lévi-Strauss considered Propp's work in *Morphology of the Folktale* to be formalist, Propp himself denied this and considered it structuralist. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'La Structure et la forme. Réflexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp', *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique appliquée*, 99 (1960), 3–36; Vladimir Propp, 'Structure and History in the Study of the Fairy Tale', trans. by H. T. McElwain, *Semeia*, 10 (1978), 57–83.

<sup>45</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Hally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> In particular, representatives of the Finnish School, like A. Aarne, whose collection and categorization of folktales by theme was both praised and criticized by Propp (*Morphology*, pp 8–10). See Heda Jason, 'Russian Criticism of the "Finnish School" in Folklore Scholarship', *Norveg*, 14 (1970), 285–94, for an English language introduction to scholarly context of Propp's time.

work in *Morphology of the Folktale* was a first step in this direction. In *Morphology*, Propp sets out to describe the common structure underlying a set of about 100 Russian fairy tales. What Propp noticed was that, despite differences in surface details, a common and consistent series of actions, performed by certain stock-characters, shaped the plots of these stories. Unlike Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, Propp's purpose was not to set forth a universal grammar of narrative or myth. His focus was directly beneath the surface of the narrative—several layers of abstraction above, for example, Lévi-Strauss' mythic structures—and exclusively on Russian folktales that had been classified 'fairy tales'. Interestingly, as Milne has shown, the direct influence of Propp's work on Biblical studies has been surprisingly limited.<sup>47</sup>

If one were to try to replicate the strengths of Propp's study of Russian heroic fairy tales, one would have to do three things. First, one would have to select a feasibly large group of texts for comparison (probably based, at least in part, on content). Second, one would have to focus one's analysis on form rather than content. Third, one would have to derive the analytical terms and categories as much

---

<sup>47</sup> While most structuralist analyses of biblical texts have had more in common with Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, a few have attempted to make use of Propp's approach with varying degrees of success. Milne's summary (pp. 125–75) of work attempting to implement Propp's methods up until the point of her own research is well done, and there is no need for me to recite it here. The point she successfully makes is that while several have consciously sought to utilize Propp's methods, the way they did so often betrayed a misunderstanding of Propp's work, usually by trying to apply the model rather than the method, or by misunderstanding the model itself. Propp's model of the Russian fairy tale is manifestly and explicitly only relevant to the Russian fairy tale. Application of its functions to other stories is pointless unless what one is trying to do is show that story X is a Russian fairy tale, or that the Russian fairy tale conventional plot structure is evident in other kinds of literature, as well. While some of the studies mentioned by Milne are better than others, none of them are truly discovering patterns within the biblical texts themselves but imposing foreign patterns upon those texts. In other words, what studies had used Propp had, in so doing, done almost precisely what Propp himself was opposed to. Milne herself is not entirely innocent of this charge, either, though not to the same degree as those whose work preceded hers. I would add to Milne's summary that a related phenomenon is that when Propp is invoked as an influence, often it is in the same breath as Greimas, whose revision and universalization of Propp's categories and terms (see *Structural Semantics*, pp. 200–203) is the more fundamentally important influence. See, for example, James Crenshaw, 'Journey Into Oblivion: A Structural Analysis of Gen. 22:1–19', in *Structuralism: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. by Susan Wittig, Pittsburgh Reprint Series, 3 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 99–112 (p. 111, n. 15).

as possible from the texts themselves rather than imposing upon them a foreign model or supposedly universal grammar of narrative.<sup>48</sup> These three imperatives are, in fact, what I have felt to be necessary in the study of biblical narratives in order to uncover their conventional structuring. In other words, the search for underlying structures as a foundation for genre-classification and the search for type-scenes are fundamentally the same endeavour. Both are focused primarily on the unifying form directly underlying the surface features of the texts, not deeper paradigmatic structures. Both emerge from the study of folklore and oral epic. Both require each set of forms to have its own set of functions and tale-roles. While I did not set out to do a ‘Proppian analysis’, according to my reading of Propp what I have done is, in retrospect, thoroughly Proppian.

#### 1.1.4 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH PROPP

While most of the specific points of contact between my work and Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* will more appropriately be discussed as they become relevant in the following chapters, a few points will help at present to clarify my methodology. My purpose, to reiterate, is to read the death-bed story of Jacob as a coherently and organically composed, conventionally-shaped death-bed narrative, and to see if this kind of reading helps to explain many of the traditional problems in the text presumed to have only diachronic explanations. This involves especially the comparison of this story with other death-bed stories. Propp chose his selection of texts from the folktales collected and classified by Aleksandr Afanás’ev, in particular those he classified (on the basis of content, not form) as ‘fairy tales’.<sup>49</sup> It was an

---

<sup>48</sup> In *Themes and Variations*, Culley expresses essentially the these same concerns and intentionally uses Propp ‘more indirectly’, that is, using his method by comparing a wide variety of texts to uncover patterns rather than his model (p. 165). This makes Culley an important exception to the trend observed in the last footnote.

<sup>49</sup> In the edition used by Propp, these were stories numbers 50–151. Later editions of Afanás’ev’s collection have numbered the stories differently.

intentional choice on Propp's part to have his corpus of texts dictated to him from without (in part), since too much involvement from him would weaken his conclusions to charges of begging the question.<sup>50</sup> I was not likewise able to select from a previously gathered and classified set of texts. My selection of texts comes from a larger generalized study of death in Hebrew narrative, in the course of which I gradually came to perceive formal similarities among certain texts. Closer investigation of these texts gave rise to a more refined awareness of structural features, enabling me to expand my selection of texts to include others I had previously overlooked. While the manner of my selection of death-bed narratives for comparison is not identical to that of Propp, I do feel that it is a justifiable selection.<sup>51</sup>

While my concepts compare to those of Propp, those terms I either invented for this thesis or chose to adopt are at times similar to Propp's terms, but at other times they are different, and they are almost never identical. For example, I was early on confronted with the need for a category name for the smallest conventional details I was identifying as the constituent elements of the type-scene. Alter used the term 'motif', but his manner of using the term was not consistent with his definition.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Propp, pp. 23–24.

<sup>51</sup> Despite the differences, operationally the two manners of selecting a corpus are similar in that the texts are initially grouped together based on surface features rather than underlying structural features. In Propp's case, the content-based grouping was performed by someone else. In my case, I have done both the content-based grouping and the subsequent structural analysis.

<sup>52</sup> Alter's definition of 'motif' in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (pp. 118–19)—'a concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object that recurs through a particular narrative'—is in accordance with general usage. See also Abrams' second definition (M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edn (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), pp. 169–70). This is sometimes called a *Leitmotif* (Baldick, p. 185). However, Alter's usage of 'motif' in relation to type-scenes (a type-scene is 'composed of a fixed sequence of motifs') is more akin to Tomashevsky's usage, as also evidenced by his references to 'bound' and 'free' motifs (e.g. p. 103; see also Robert Alter, 'Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention', *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 355–68). See Boris Tomashevsky, 'Thematics', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 61–98, for the definitive discussion of 'free' and 'bound' motifs. This matches Prince's second definition for 'motif'. Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. edn (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

Nevertheless, because ‘motif’ was the best term available to me, I have chosen to use it, albeit without meaning anything more specific by it than any recurrent feature that contributes to the recognizability of the scene. These can be actions, images, even specific vocabulary. I am not satisfied with this term, but I have not found anything more appropriate.<sup>53</sup>

Among Russian Formalists it was not uncommon for ‘motif’ to be used to designate the smallest, most fundamental conventional unit. This was differentiated from ‘theme’, which was a larger conventional unit thought to be composed of motifs.<sup>54</sup> Propp noted, however, that even commonly identified motifs, like ‘a dragon kidnaps the tsar’s daughter’ could be broken down into smaller elements, specifically the constituent acts of the typical characters. Therefore, he added the term ‘function’ as an even more fundamental conventional building block, meaning any typical act of a tale-role or stock character. My way of using the term ‘motif’ is more akin to Propp’s term ‘function’ than it is to the Formalists’ ‘motif’, with the exception that I have not limited my meaning to actions only.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, I have used ‘theme’ to designate the distinguishing details of individual Episodes within a multi-Episode death-bed story.<sup>56</sup>

Worth noting, as well, is the fact that Propp’s texts were independent narratives made up of many scenes. Hebrew death-bed stories are not independent,

---

<sup>53</sup> Dundes (p. 208), in applying Propp’s methods, also chooses not to adopt ‘function’, using instead ‘motifeme.’ I am not familiar enough with Dundes’ sources to follow in this decision.

<sup>54</sup> Propp reviews this in his first chapter (pp. 3–18). This is very similar to Alter’s term ‘type-scene’, while Alter uses the term ‘theme’ in a way more typical of Western literary criticism, i.e. an abstract unifying thought, concept, or emotion running through a work (pp. 118–19).

<sup>55</sup> J. L. Fischer, ‘The Sociopsychological Analysis of Folktales’, *CA*, 4 (1963), 235–95 (p. 288), likewise prefers to speak of ‘event-images’ because of the conventional nature of non-action elements. For other kinds of repetitive elements, Propp used other terms, like auxiliary elements and motivations, which I have not chosen to adopt. Propp believed there was a distinction, as well, between functions and auxiliary elements in that functions were consistent and in a fixed order, whereas non-action elements were variable. Propp, pp. 71–78.

<sup>56</sup> For more on Episodes and themes, see section 1.3 below.

but in every case they serve to further the plot of a larger story, and they may be made up of only one scene. Propp's methodological principles are applicable, regardless, but this fact is noteworthy because two of Propp's central observations about the Russian heroic fairy tale were the limited number and the fixed sequence of the constituent functions. Whereas a Hebrew death-bed story brings characters and meta-data into it from the surrounding narrative, independent fairy tales rely more heavily on the fixed-nature of their structure to communicate implied meaning. The implications of this difference will be made apparent when pertinent.

### 1.1.5 SUMMARY

Until only very recently, biblical scholarship has paid little attention to the conventional shaping of Jacob's death-bed narrative in its current form. Even the growth in acceptability and popularity of synchronic approaches to biblical texts has done little to improve this. While several scholars have recognized the narrative unity of Genesis 47.28–50.26 (or some unit like this), it is rare that one argues for it on the basis of narrative convention rather than simply assuming it or reducing the argument to the identification of chiasma and parallels. The analysis of sub-surface structures in narrative has, on the other hand, been very common in literary criticism, linguistics, folkloristics, and anthropology in the form of structuralism. While most such analyses devoted to biblical texts have followed primarily in the footsteps of Lévi-Strauss or Greimas, my search for conventional plot structures and their constituent elements is most akin to the work of Propp as found in *The Morphology of the Folktale*, though there are important differences.

## 1.2 THE STARTING POINT FOR JACOB'S DEATH-BED STORY

Jacob's death-bed story begins recognisably following the conventional shape at Genesis 47.28, and that shape continues through to the end of Genesis.<sup>57</sup> Despite the fact that verse 27 contains material which is not incompatible with a death-bed story's exposition, it is most appropriately read in connection with what goes before. The main reason this is so is that the name 'Israel' in verse 27 is best understood to refer to the whole clan and not just Jacob the individual.<sup>58</sup> Though the first verb, וישב,

---

<sup>57</sup> Even though the task of unit delimitation is intended to discern boundary markers inherent in a text, the division of texts into units is often at least as much a matter of imposing order as perceiving it. When identifying the boundaries of a narrative unit in biblical texts, one runs the risk of imposing onto that text a particular conceptualisation of the way texts are organised that is not inherent in it. This is especially true when one assumes that all boundaries are hard boundaries, or, in other words, the place where a literary unit begins or ends is assumed to be locatable at a particular place between two sentences. It is doubtful that there are many biblical scholars who consciously make this assumption, but generations of looking at biblical texts through almost exclusively diachronic lenses (with the coordinating assumptions about the ways texts are received, edited, and inserted), combined with the prominence in modern literature of text-dividing conventions like chapter divisions, seems to have instilled in modern readers of biblical texts a tendency toward thinking, for example, text unit A ends here where text unit B begins. While this is sometimes, perhaps even generally, true, the ways texts interrelate with one another are far more varied than a simple sequence of relatively independent scenes, and, in ancient texts as well as modern ones, scenes bleed into one another.

<sup>58</sup> For *ישראל* as a collective, see Dillmann, p. 425; Franz Delitzsch, *Genesis* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1887), p. 502; Skinner, p. 501; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Chapman, 1977), p. 450; Westermann, III, 127, 191–2 (but note that Westermann does not assign 27a to P, only 27b); Matthews, II, 860; Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001), p. 155; Amos, p. 264. Among those who understand *בארץ ישראל* to be sg. are Gunkel (p. 417) who also notably attributes v. 27 to E (except for the words *בארץ* (מצרים); S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis: With Introduction and Notes*, WC (London: Methuen, 1904), p. 374 (who attributes 47.27a to J because of the phrase *בארץ גשן*); Procksch, pp. 267–68; König, p. 57 (n. 3); Redford, p. 131; David McLain Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. 112; Arnold, p. 372. Von Rad does not directly address the issue, but his attribution of 27a to JE rather than P might point in this direction. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. by John H. Marks, OTL, rev. edn (London: SCM, 1972), pp. 406–11. Speiser (pp. 289, 354) likewise attributes 27a to JE (specifically J), and holds that Israel as a per. name is 'an invariable indication of J's authorship'. Based on his drawing of a parallel between 36.8 and 47.27, Wenham (II, 438, 449) seems to be identifying 'Israel' as a per. name. Coats (*Genesis*, p. 295) draws a parallel with 37.1 and implies Israel to be a per. name in 47.27. In light of the ambiguity, Sarna (pp. 314, 323, 329) and Hamilton (II, 621) suggest a semantic blurring effect where the identities of Israel the person and Israel the nation are merging. This is neither satisfying nor necessary. Ambiguity from the reader's perspective (or perceived ambiguity, meaning a readerly inability to distinguish between two readings) does not necessarily indicate ambiguity from the narrator's perspective (intended ambiguity), which is what Sarna is suggesting. Moreover,



is singular, when **ישראל** is used as a collective in the Genesis through Numbers it is far more common for it to be grammatically singular than plural (22 occurrences with at least one singular verb versus two occurrences exclusively paired with a plural verb). Furthermore, the accompanying plural verbs appear to be grammatically typical (or at least not unique—Leviticus 19.2).<sup>59</sup> If ‘Israel’ is a collective here, it is worth noting that this instance occurs in the narrator’s voice, but in the following death-bed story, the name ‘Israel’ as a reference to the nation only happens, with two exceptions, in the voice of the character Jacob. The two exceptions are the aetiological moment in 49.28 and in 50.25 (during the narration of the death of Joseph). Otherwise, the name ‘Israel’, when used by the narrator, functions as a marked name for Jacob.<sup>60</sup> So the use of the name ‘Israel’ differs between 47.27 and what follows.

Whether or not ‘Israel’ refers to Jacob the individual, he is included in the term in verse 27, so the overall statement can function as a summary of a blessed remaining life, a sort of ‘happily ever after—until death’ convention one finds at the

---

ambiguity from the narrator’s perspective generally takes the form of double entendre, often but not always for the purpose of irony. Instead, Sarna appears to be suggesting that the narrator is using a figure of speech (a metonym—‘Israel’ represents the whole) to communicate a mystical truth. Sarna points to 46.3–8 and 48.20 as other examples, but neither passage supports his proposal without presupposing it. Gen 46.3–8 uses the construct chain **בני־ישראל**, where ‘Israel’ could refer either to the individual or the nation, but this ambiguity does not bear the weight of a mystical identity of patriarch and nation. In 48.20–21, the name Israel occurs twice, but neither time is its referent ambiguous. In 48.20 it refers to the future people, and in 48.21 it refers to the individual. There is no evidence to suggest that both meanings occur simultaneously in a given instance. See also Hoop, p. 325; Waltke, p. 591. This is essentially what Barr calls an illegitimate totality transfer. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 218.

<sup>59</sup> For **ישראל** as a collective (without ‘sons of’ or any other const. noun) but grammatically sg. see Exod 4.22; 14.30, 31; 17.11; 19.2 (notice especially the surrounding pl. verbs); 32.4, 8 (sg. 2<sup>nd</sup> per. pron.); Num 20.21; 21.1 (**ממנו** can be either sg. or pl.), 2, 3 (although **ויהרם** could have **יהיה** as its subj., and **ויקרא** could be an impersonal sg.), 17, 21, 24, 25, 31 (**וישב ישראל בארץ האמרי**—same phrase as 47.27); 22.2; 24.2, 5 (sg. 2<sup>nd</sup> personal pron.), 18; 25.1 (**וישב** again; cf. 47.27), 3. As collective with pl. verb or pron. without a sg. nearby, see only Num 16.34; 32.13. This trend continues into Deut, where sg. and pl. verbs and pron. are mingled freely.

<sup>60</sup> This issue is discussed more fully in section 3.2.1.

beginning of other death-bed stories.<sup>61</sup> But the material also functions very well as the conclusion to both the migration portion of the story (starting in 46.1) and as an echo of 37.1 (וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו בארץ כנען).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, this recapitulation of the theme 'be fruitful and multiply' which began in Genesis 1 is the final and climactic one in present story time (48.4 is an internal analepsis of a promise rather than a report that the promise was fulfilled).<sup>63</sup> In light of this it seems to function better macrostructurally as a conclusion than as a preface.

The syntax does not connect it definitively either with what precedes or with what follows. Neither do the conventions governing narrative beginnings and endings give clear direction, since summary statements in the narrator's voice such as this are found in both the conclusions and the expositions of Hebrew stories.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Including, in fact, the very next verse. See also Gen 24.1b; 50.22a; Josh 23.1a; Tob 14.2. This blessing motif is especially shaped by its context in Genesis, where the verbs פרה and רבה are motivic, connected with creation and God's standard blessing. Carr, p. 112; Matthews, II, 861; de Hoop, p. 325.

<sup>62</sup> De Hoop, p. 325; Coats, *Genesis*, 295. There is a pattern in Genesis in the conclusions of the *toledot* of the three patriarchs where the dwelling places of the two different groups are contrasted. Gen 37.1 contrasts with the dwelling place of Esau following *Toledot Isaac*. *Toledot Jacob* begins in 37.2. The death of Abraham is concluded in a reverse order, with the dwelling place of Isaac, his successor, appearing first (25.11), followed by *Toledot Ishmael*, the effect also being a contrast in the dwelling places of the two main competitors for Abraham's legacy (perhaps more starkly since it is often observed that Isaac's dwelling place in Beer-lahai-roi is elsewhere more closely associated with Ishmael; Friedman, p. 86). In 47.27, the dwelling place and condition of the Israelites is contrasted with that of the Egyptians. Wenham (II, 438) argues against comparing 37.1 and 47.27 as concluding notices since the subject of 37.1 contrasts with the subject of the preceding *toledot* in 36.1, while 47.27 does not likewise contrast with 37.2. The contrast, however, is not strictly with the titular subject of the preceding *toledot*, but with the people group whose fortunes were just previously narrated (or in the case of Isaac in 25.11, whose fortunes are about to be narrated).

<sup>63</sup> Janzen, p. 183.

<sup>64</sup> As just one example, statements regarding the dwelling place of a person or group using the verb ישב are found at the beginning, middle, and end of narrative units, but in Genesis they tend to occur more frequently at the end of units. In Num, these kinds of notices actually occur slightly more often in the middle of a unit in transition from one subunit to another. My count of those instances of the verb ישב in Genesis and the rest of the Tetrateuch that relate, in the narrator's voice, where a person or people group settled or lived in present story time (i.e. not analeptically) are as follows: Gen, at the beginning of a unit: 11.2; 20.1; 37.1; 50.22; middle: 26.6; 26.17; 29.14; end: 4.16; 11.31; 13.12; 18; 21.20; 22.19; 25.11; 36.8; 47.11. The rest of the Tetrateuch, at the beginning of a unit: Num 25.1; middle: Exod 2.15; Num 21.31, 34; 22.8; end: Num 32.40. I cannot decide whether Num 20.1 belongs

Rather than forcing a choice between conclusion or introduction, Genesis 47.27 may be best understood as transition material, an example of the narratorial technique of shifting tempo to bridge two narrative units.<sup>65</sup> As such it would not so much be an example of conventions specific to death-bed stories as a general convention of Hebrew narrative, comparable to any number of cinematic transition techniques (long-distance establishing shots, audio bleeds, fades, dissolves, etc.). It both concludes what comes before and introduces what comes after, and the manner in which it introduces what comes after is compatible with the exposition of conventional death-bed stories. But, once again, because ‘Israel’ most likely refers to the group and not the individual, and because it concludes a motif that recurs throughout Genesis, formal analysis of Jacob’s death-bed story begins at 47.28.<sup>66</sup>

Genesis 47.28 itself is not an incontestable place to divide the text. It too, like verse 27, can be understood as transition material, belonging with what comes before and what comes after. The detail that Jacob lives in Egypt seventeen years in particular connects verse 28 with all that precedes as far back as 37.2 by forming an *inclusio* with Joseph’s starting age of seventeen. Source-critical analysis overwhelmingly identifies at least the second half of 47.27 along with verse 28 as belonging to P. Because of a notable tendency in biblical scholarship to suppose that source-critical units are meaningful literary or plot units, verses 27 and 28 are sometimes kept together, whether both introduce what comes after,<sup>67</sup> both conclude

---

more clearly with what comes before or after. Then again, even where the motif more clearly belongs with one or another unit, its function is very often transitional. See Walsh, pp. 186–89.

<sup>65</sup> Wenham observes, ‘it is characteristic of the editor’s method to include in the final scene of a section a trailer for the next one.’ He gives as examples 4.25–6; 6.5–8; 9.24–27. Wenham, II, 439. Wilson (p. 194) calls v. 27 ‘a hinge verse.’

<sup>66</sup> It is, perhaps, noteworthy that in the MT’s division of Genesis into twelve *sidrot* or liturgical subdivisions, the last division falls along the line between vv. 27 and 28. This division, however, is not accompanied by the customary *petuhah* or *setumah* break in the text.

<sup>67</sup> Wenham, II, 438; Waltke, p. 591; Matthews (II, 860) deals with 47.27–31 as a unit despite the fact that his base text, the NIV, creates a paragraph division between vv. 27 and 28.

what precedes (so that Jacob's death-bed story proper does not begin until verse 29),<sup>68</sup> or both verses are separated out as independent transitional material.<sup>69</sup>

However, 47.28 contains the detail of Jacob's total lifespan, and this sort of detail does not elsewhere occur in Genesis (and, indeed, in Hebrew narrative) outside the context of a death narrative or report. Even if 47.28 is P material, like Genesis 2.4a and 37.2a it is part of the narrative framework and belongs with what comes after. So, while both verses 27 and 28 are transitional, that is they have ties with what comes before as well as what comes after, the corporate identity of 'Israel' in verse 27 along with the focus on Jacob as an individual and his total-age notice in verse 28 justify connecting the latter with the following death-bed story. Whatever literary boundary there may be is admittedly fuzzy and dependent on the way the implied reader would perceive the two verses, but based on the gathered evidence, it is at least plausible if not probable that the implied reader would perceive the narrative momentum shift between verse 27 and verse 28.

## 1.3 THE PLAN FOR WHAT FOLLOWS

### 1.3.1 DEATH-BED STORY EPISODES

The shape of this book is based on the conventional shape of Jacob's death-bed story. Each of the following five chapters corresponds to a conventional unit inherent in the

---

<sup>68</sup> Westermann, III, 191–92; Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*, 2nd edn (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), pp. 204–5.

<sup>69</sup> De Hoop (pp. 325–26) argues for something similar on synchronic grounds rather than diachronic grounds. He keeps 47.27–28 together as a prelude to the entire Jacob death-bed story, the first of the four following scenes beginning, in his estimation, in v. 29. My differences with de Hoop in this matter are not particularly significant. It boils down to a matter of subjective weighting of details. Both of us would agree in viewing vv. 27 and 28 as containing transitional and balancing material. A point de Hoop notes in favour of keeping the verses together and understanding vv. 27 and 28 functioning together as a prelude for the death-bed story is the fact Joseph's death-bed story contains the verbs *וַיֵּשֶׁב* and *וַיַּחַי* in its preparation in 50.22. These verbs also appear in the preparation of Jacob's death-bed story in 47.27 and 28, respectively.

text: four Episodes and an Epilogue.<sup>70</sup> Episodes are the fundamental sequences of motifs in Hebrew death-bed stories.<sup>71</sup> This pattern has at its core a Testament with a particular concern addressed to a particular addressee. The Testament begins either with a simple speech introduction or with some kind of narration recounting the initiation of a meeting between the Testator and addressee.

Before this Testament-initiating material is frequently found some kind exposition in the narrator's voice that I call the Preparation. The Preparation establishes the temporal setting, but more importantly it establishes the need for the dying character to give his or her Testament. Some Episodes have no Preparatory material, especially non-initial Episodes in multi-Episode stories where the setting has already been established. Following a Testament is usually some kind of concluding material. This concluding material takes two basic forms. At its simplest, it is merely a brief narration bringing the scene to a close. This I call a Denouement. Some Episodes have more extended concluding material made up of one or more short stories detailing the execution of the Testament. These more elaborate conclusions I call Epilogues. When a Testament ends and is concluded, but the Testator's death is not narrated, one will find a new Preparation and/or Testament with a new theme. The death of the Testator is only narrated after the final Episode.

---

<sup>70</sup> I distinguish conceptually between the terms 'Episode' and 'scene.' A scene, at least as I use the term, is primarily a feature of *histoire*, meaning it is a single moment in time in the story usually having one setting. On the other hand, I use the term 'Episode' more as a feature of *récit*, meaning it pertains more to the structure of the way the story is told.

<sup>71</sup> My concern is not with a general theory of conventional plot structures. Whether other conventional plot structures can be similarly divided up into repeated units like the Hebrew death-bed story's Episodes would have to be determined separately for each individual conventional plot. I suspect many conventional plots do use repetitions of groups of motifs, especially since Propp observed a very similar phenomenon in the Russian heroic fairy tale, but I am very doubtful that this similarity indicates anything about conventional plots in general.

The simplest death-bed stories are made up of only one Episode, but others, like Jacob's, are made up of multiple Episodes.<sup>72</sup> Each Episode in a multi-Episode story has a particular combination of subject or concern<sup>73</sup> and addressee, or what I call the Episode's theme.<sup>74</sup> The rationale for the chapter divisions of this book is entirely based on the structure of Jacob's death-bed story. Each chapter uncovers the conventional elements in a given Episode (or Epilogue, in the case of chapter six) and shows how, in many instances, looking at the narrative as a conventionally-shaped death-bed story offers a better explanation for the features of the final form than the prevailing diachronic theories.

### 1.3.2 PREVIEW OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

Chapter two concerns Genesis 47.28–31, whose theme is Jacob's burial request to Joseph. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 deal with the conventional shape and motifs of the Episode's Preparation. Section 2.2 compares the phrasing of 47.29 with the chosen-line genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. Section 2.3 concerns the Episode's Testament. An important feature of death-bed Testaments is that they are commonly a context for legal ritual and language. Ritual and legal language and activity have

---

<sup>72</sup> What I am here calling 'Episode' is very comparable to Propp's concept of moves, which are repetitions within a single tale of a sequence of functions. Propp, pp. 92–96. See especially combinations two and five.

<sup>73</sup> There are many different kinds of concerns, all of which pertain to the setting of the Testator's house in order, or the insuring that his/her death will be a blessed one. Kinds of concerns include the securing of a wife/potential for descendants in the next generation, proper burial, the selection of a worthy successor, and instructions for the preservation of the Testator's legacy.

<sup>74</sup> Rather than addressing different issues with different people in a single narrative sub-unit, Hebrew death-bed stories exhibit a tendency toward a multiplication of sub-units, each with a simple theme. The main exception to this in the Hebrew Bible is the death of Moses in Deut 31–34. This narrative can be divided into three Episodes and an Epilogue (31.1–13; 31.14–32.47; 32.48–33.29; Gen 34 is the Epilogue), the first two of which each address three groups: Joshua, Israel, and the Levites/Priests. Even here, however, each cycle of addresses/Episode centres around one basic idea. This can be contrasted with the tendency in the comparable non-canonical death-bed stories toward covering multiple subjects in a single speech instance (see especially the *T. 12 Patr.*, Tob 14, and I Macc 2.49–70).

certain qualities that help to explain some enigmatic features of this and the following Episodes. Section 2.4 examines the Denouement with special attention given to Jacob's bowing on his bed as conventional imagery and as thematic recapitulation within the Joseph story.

In chapter three I turn my attention to Genesis 48. The conventional pattern is not as obvious in Genesis 48, so section 3.1 addresses some general issues in reading the chapter as a death-bed Episode. Section 3.2 highlights the conventional Preparatory motifs in verses 1 and 2 and then focuses on the role of Jacob's two names, Jacob and Israel, here and elsewhere in Genesis. In light of the Hebrew death-bed story's use as a context for legal issues and ritual, I suggest an explanation that makes sense of the names' occurrences not just within the Joseph story but also within the Jacob cycle. In addition, the distribution of the names in 47.28–50.26 proves to have some relationship to the structure of the passage. Section 3.3 looks at 48.3–7 through two main lenses. First, it is compared to the historical prologues of biblical and ancient Near Eastern covenant-initiation forms. Second, it is compared to Genesis 35, the most immediate referent text, and to the other El-Shadday promise texts. Finally, the issue of the relevance of verse seven is examined in connection with the role of verses 3–7 as a whole within the larger passage.

The comparison with covenant forms continues in section 3.4 in connection with 48.8–12, a section of the chapter with many enigmatic features. Once again, the legal/ritual aspect of the conventional death-bed story provides synchronic alternative explanations for features of the text that have often been taken as evidence of its compositional history. A lingering question in connection with 48.8–12 is what, precisely, is happening? Is it a blessing, a legitimation, or an adoption? Is one justified in using the term 'adoption' in relation to ancient Israel at all? Section 3.4.4 demonstrates how Joseph assumes two of the four tale-roles found

in death-bed stories—Successor and Agent—and how Joseph’s sons are characterized as Worthy Successors, as well. A last segment of 3.4 examines some connecting threads between this passage and other parts of Jacob’s death-bed story. Somewhat more briefly, section 3.5 addresses the integrity of verses 15–16 with the surrounding narration and the relationship between the two blessings in verses 15–16 and 20. The passage’s connection with the rest of Genesis is again highlighted in a comparison of 48.21–22 with the non-Priestly patriarchal promise pattern.

Chapter four focuses on the narrative framework of 49.1–28 rather than the oracular poetry. Section 4.1 continues the discussion from chapter three concerning the use of Jacob’s two names, particularly regarding its importance in distinguishing a P layer in verse 1. Section 4.2 examines the climactic aspects of verse 28 and the way changes in narrative tempo demarcate sub-unit boundaries. Section 4.3 shows how all twelve sons are now characterized as corporate Worthy Co-Successors, in contrast especially with the characterizations of rejected sons like Ishmael and Esau.

Chapter five examines the fourth Episode, the second burial request in 49.29–33, especially in connection with the Worthy Successor conventions and with the form of the death-bed story as a whole. This chapter concerns only the conventional features and form of the fourth Episode up to the point of Jacob’s death, because the extended concluding material in chapter 50 deserves special attention.

Chapter six covers the story’s Epilogue, the three short passages in chapter 50 relating to Jacob’s burial, the lasting reconciliation among the brothers, and Joseph’s own death. First, section 6.1 discusses the general phenomenon of Epilogues in Hebrew death-bed stories. Jacob’s burial in 50.1–14 is unusually elaborate among death-bed stories and, therefore, cannot be analysed to any great extent as ‘conventional.’ However, the sense and unity of the final form is debatable, so section 6.2 argues that evidence of unevenness in the final form has often been



overstated. The survival of Jacob's legacy in 50.15–21 reflects a conventional concern of death-bed stories often addressed in Epilogues. Finally, Joseph's death in 50.22–26 is the subject of study not only for its role in Jacob's death-bed story, but also as a conventional death-bed story in its own right. Section 6.5.1.1 is dedicated to investigating the meaning of יָלְדוּ עַל־בְּרָכִי in 50.23 and its relationship, if any, to Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim. Finally, chapter seven briefly summarizes the conclusions of chapters two through six.

## 1.4 CONCLUSION

While this thesis delves into many different kinds of issues in relation to Genesis 47.28–50.26, it is all unified by the search for conventional structuring as a hitherto under-explored explanation for the shape of the final form of the story. Most of this conventional structuring is connected to a Hebrew death-bed type-scene, but some of it is connected with Genesis as a larger literary unit, and some with various kinds of smaller forms found in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. Biblical scholarship has approached the text from many different methodological angles, but an approach precisely like what I have sketched is not to be found. This search for conventional structuring has some things in common with certain aspects of Structuralism, but most especially with the work of Vladimir Propp. Much of what I have done replicates the strengths of Propp's method rather than his model. I have chosen to begin with 47.28 rather than 47.27 or 29 because that is where the text of Genesis begins recognizably demonstrating the pattern of the Hebrew death-bed story also found in several other places in the Hebrew Bible. The following chapters are each focused on a conventional sequence of motifs, or Episode, from Jacob's death-bed story, with the exception of chapter six, which covers the Epilogue in Genesis 50.

## 2 THE BURIAL REQUEST TO JOSEPH

*Genesis 47.28–31*

### 2.0 TEXT AND PRELIMINARY REMARKS

28 ויהי ימי־יעקב שבע עשרה שנה ויהי<sup>75</sup> ימי־יעקב שני חייו שבע שנים וארבעים ומאת שנה: 29 ויקרבו ימי־ישראל למות ויקרא לבנו ליוסף ויאמר לו אִם־נא מצאתי חן בעיניך שים־נא ידך תחת ירכי ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת אל־נא תקברני במצרים: 30 ושכבתי עִם־אבותי ונשאתני ממצרים וקברתני בקברתם<sup>76</sup> ויאמר אנכי אעשה כדברך<sup>77</sup>: 31 ויאמר השבעה לי וישבע לו וישתחו ישראל על־ראש המטה<sup>78</sup>:

28 Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. And it was that the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years. 29 The time of Israel to die drew near, and he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, ‘If I have found favour in your eyes, place your hand under my thigh and do with me faithfully and truthfully: do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers. Take me up from Egypt and bury me in their tomb.’ And Joseph said, ‘I will do according to your words.’ 31 Jacob said, ‘Swear to me.’ And he swore. Then Jacob bowed himself on top of his bed.

<sup>75</sup> Based on a few manuscripts and ancient versions the *BHS* critical apparatus corrects ויהי ימי־יעקב to ויהיו ימי־יעקב. While the corrected form is more typical in Genesis (5.4, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27; 35.28), this is not the only instance where the MT has singular ויהי in this context (also Gen 5.23 and 31). Third person masculine singular verbal forms are often used as an ‘agreement neutral verb form’ (Joüon §150 *b*). Admittedly, when a noun is predicated rather than a verb, there is a noticeable tendency in Biblical Hebrew for the number of ויהי/ויהיו to match that of the noun, but this is not universally consistent. The correction is unnecessary, however, since the sentence’s meaning is unchanged, and since we cannot from extant evidence determine whether the plural form was considered exclusively correct or whether the singular and plural forms were felt to be interchangeable, with a slight preference for the plural when a plural noun is predicated. Hamilton (II, 621) suggests assonance with the earlier ויהי as a possible motivation for the use of the singular form.

<sup>76</sup> The *BHS* critical apparatus corrects בקברתי to בקברתם based on Gen 50.5, but this kind of variation is unremarkable. The context of 47.30 pertains to Jacob’s burial with his fathers, while the fathers are not mentioned in 50.5, only Jacob, so this particular variation matches its context.

<sup>77</sup> Multiple manuscripts have כדבר־ך (with mater lectionis). The meaning is not impacted either way.

<sup>78</sup> Gr. and Syr. read המטה (staff) for המטה (bed). See discussion below in section 2.3

The narrative of *Toledot Jacob* starts recognisably following the pattern of the conventional death-bed story in 47.28–31, the first of two Episodes whose primary concern is burial instructions. It is also the first of two Episodes whose primary addressee is Joseph. Despite typical diachronic distinction between verse 28 and verses 29–31, the whole exhibits the overarching unity of a standard death-bed Episode consisting of three parts: Preparation, Testament, and Denouement.

## 2.1 THE PREPARATION (GENESIS 47.28–29A)

The story begins with a summary of Jacob's remaining life. The preceding verse concludes the migration of Jacob and his family to Egypt, which is the resolution of the last remaining tension in Jacob's life and its last significant event. Verse 28 skims over the next seventeen years, implying their non-eventfulness and, therefore, their peacefulness and blessedness. This moves present story-time forward to the end of Jacob's life, when death is imminent. A summary of remaining life is also found in other deathbed stories in Genesis 24.1b, 50.22a, Joshua 23.1a, and Tobit 14.2.<sup>79</sup> In some other stories, the death-bed story itself does not begin with such a summary, but the effect is created by the conclusion of the preceding story-unit.<sup>80</sup> In every case, the effect of the summary is to imply the non-eventfulness and, more especially, the peacefulness of the life remaining to the dying character after the last significant narrated event.

Some have found the 'seventeen years' detail suspect. Certain features of the last several chapters of Genesis are thought to hint at a shorter story timeline, now suppressed under P's chronology, wherein Jacob dies as soon as he arrives in Egypt.

---

<sup>79</sup> Coats (*Genesis*, p. 301) makes a similar observation about 47.28 and compares it with 50.22 but does not compare it with 24.1, Josh 23.1, or Tob 14.2.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Macc 2.48 for instance—compare this with the lingering effect of Gen 47.27.

This second chronology belongs to the JE redaction/non-P Joseph story.<sup>81</sup> But where does the Joseph story give this impression? Jacob's anticipation of his own death is a recurring theme in chapters 37–47, found especially in 37.35; 42.38; 43.27–28; 44.22, 29, 31; 45.9, 13, 28; and 46.30. With the exceptions of 45.28 and 46.30, however, none of these anticipate immediate death after seeing Joseph. Most (Genesis 37.35; 42.38; 44.22, 29, 31) attribute Jacob's hypothetical coming death to grief, which would be indicative of an ignoble death (a possibility that generates some of the plot's tension).<sup>82</sup> As Redford (p. 169) recognizes, Genesis 43.27 is an inquiry by Joseph into Jacob's well-being and has nothing to do with the immediacy of Jacob's death. Gunkel (p. 415) understands Joseph's urging of his brothers to hurry in 45.9 and 13 to connote the nearness of Jacob's death, but this is not necessary, either. The only texts that might imply Jacob's immediate death upon arrival in Egypt are 45.28, 46.4, or 46.30. These verses, however, do not say that Jacob must die as soon as he sees Joseph so much as they declare that Jacob can die a peaceful death once he has seen Joseph. This is in direct contrast to Jacob's earlier assertions about the quality of his own death in light of the loss of a child.<sup>83</sup> The

---

<sup>81</sup> Gunkel, pp. 424–25; Procksch, p. 268; Skinner, p. 495; von Rad, p. 414; Vawter, p. 451. Speiser (p. 357) does not acknowledge any chronological inconsistency, but he does appear to imagine Manasseh and Ephraim to be young children in ch. 48, and this requires some degree of inconsistency in the narrated time-line.

<sup>82</sup> The conventional Hebrew death-bed story is, in my opinion, the stereotypically good or noble death in Hebrew narrative. Many of its conventional features address specific characteristics of the good life or their counterpart characteristics in the context of death. For some recent helpful discussion of good and bad death in ancient Israel and in the ancient world in general, see Clare Gittings, 'Good Death, Historical Perspectives', *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 210–11; Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, "'Alt und Lebensatt...' - Der Tod zur rechten Zeit", in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, FAT, 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 111–36; Martin Leuenberger, 'Das Problem des vorzeitigen Todes in der israelitischen Religions- und Theologiegeschichte', *ibid.*, pp. 151–76; Jan Dietrich, 'Der Tod von eigener Hand im Alten Testament und alten Orient: Eskapistische, aggressive und oblativ Selbsttötungen', *ibid.*, pp. 177–98. Lloyd R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives On Death*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 48–51, also briefly discusses the 'bad' death.

<sup>83</sup> Waltke, p. 585.

recurring theme of Jacob's death is transformed from a death marred by emotional turmoil to one graced by peace.<sup>84</sup>

Without these three texts, the impression that there are two competing chronologies in Jacob's death-bed story proves to be an artificial result of (1) a misreading of 48.8–11 (concerning the ages of Manasseh and Ephraim—see section 3.2.5) and (2) the source-critical tendency to attribute chronological details exclusively to P. This automatically leaves the non-P Joseph story without chronological data in its pre-Genesis form, creating a faint impression that Jacob's death is immediate simply by failing to say anything to the contrary. This kind of argument from silence depends for its validity on the assumption that the redactor left the pre-Priestly materials essentially pristine (that what may be discerned of a pre-Genesis, non-Priestly source/tradition can be reliably reconstructed so as to enable us to characterize it as a whole), but this assumption cannot stand up to scrutiny.<sup>85</sup> So, while there is a discrepancy between Jacob's words in 46.30 and the seventeen years he lives in Egypt according to 47.28, there is, in the end, no good

---

<sup>84</sup> Gunkel (p. 402) observes: 'Dies Wort [42.38 specifically, but aware of it as a theme] bildet ein tief empfundenen Gegenstück zu dem schönen Tode, den Jaqob schliesslich sterben darf.' Westermann (III, 203) and Arnold (p. 370) also identify Jacob's anticipated death as thematic.

<sup>85</sup> Dillmann (p. 425) already observes in relation to this passage that, 'Das urspr. Gefüge der Erzählung des C [the Yahwist] ist von R[edactor], zum Zweck der Compilation mit den anderen Quellen, aufgelöst.' The idea that the pre-Genesis sources were preserved essentially intact is one of necessary presuppositions of classical source-criticism, but it has rarely if ever been implemented consistently. Virtually all commentators have realized in some way and at certain points that the pre-Genesis sources were not simply cut and pasted. Without this presupposition, however, it becomes very difficult to characterize a diachronic layer in contrast with another based on what sort of details are present or absent. See Roger Norman Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup, 53 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), esp. pp. 49–50. For example, does the fact that the traditional J materials do not include much in the way of chronological data mean that J did not have such data, or that P or R overwrote this data, or that both sets of data were essentially the same? We cannot know the answer simply by analysing the extant texts.

reason to presume competing chronologies.<sup>86</sup> The discrepancy is better understood as a contrast between character expectation and the actual unfolding of events.<sup>87</sup>

The second half of the verse gives Jacob's total age at death. Clearly, the statement of Jacob's abnormally long life connotes his blessedness, as in Genesis 25.7 and 35.28. It is noteworthy that the age-at-death notice is most commonly found at the end of death-bed stories in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>88</sup> Here, however, the notice comes at the beginning of the death-bed narrative. Rather than simply dismissing this difference in placement as random aesthetic variation, a sensitive reading shows that the notice functions differently when its placement differs.<sup>89</sup> The giving of Jacob's total life-span before his death pinpoints the following scene at the very end of his life. It indicates that there will be no significant amount of life after the next several scenes.<sup>90</sup> The fact that the notice comes in the voice of the extradiegetic narrator<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Westermann's claim that 'Ein Abstand von siebzehn Jahren, in denen nichts geschieht, wäre hier durch die Gesetze der Erzählung von vornherein ausgeschlossen' is utterly without foundation. Westermann, III, 209.

<sup>87</sup> So also Sarna, p. 323. Jacob is not alone in regarding death as imminent long before it actually occurs. If we take the chronology of Genesis at face value, a pattern emerges in the deaths of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All three are aware that death is coming and make plans in light of this long before they actually die. Josh 13–24 can likewise be understood as one long death-bed type-scene—the approaching death motif in 13.1 frames everything after it as the putting of Joshua's house in order. This inevitably involves some significant time-distance, in terms of both *histoire* and *récit*.

<sup>88</sup> The giving of the precise age of the dying hero at the beginning of the death-bed story is not typical in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only here and in 50.22b. This, along with what appears to be the unusual length of Jacob's death-bed scene, leads Sarna to suppose that this placement is exceptional and due to the necessities of plot (p. 323). But because Sarna's corpus of death-bed stories does not include material from outside of the Hebrew Bible, or even outside of Genesis, he does not notice that this placement of an age motif is not especially rare in the wider literary context. Tob 14.2 occurs right in the middle of all the material that could be connected with Tobit's death-bed story. The motif is evenly split between introductions and conclusions in the *T. 12 Patr.*

<sup>89</sup> Regarding functions in Russian fairy tales that are similar in content but occur at different points in the plot, Propp also argues that a function is to be defined in accordance with its consequences (p. 67).

<sup>90</sup> Coats, p. 301; Wilson, p. 195.

<sup>91</sup> Alter, pp. 116, 158; Sternberg, p. 51. Bar-Efrat does not speak in terms of 'reliable' or 'unreliable', but his understanding of the relationship between narrator in biblical narrative and the reader is that of a reliable narrator: the reader is intended to agree with the narrator rather than be suspicious of him/her. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. by Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTSup, 70, 2nd edn (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989), pp. 13–23. Gunn reads the last four chapters of II

makes certain the nearness of Jacob's death (as contrasted with motifs coming from the mouths of human characters, as in Genesis 27.2). Its implicative purpose, or illocutionary force, is to announce that some kind of story related to Jacob's death is beginning.<sup>92</sup>

Another aspect of the age of Jacob which relates to the death-bed story as a conventional plot structure is that it is numerologically significant. A character's age at death is not always symbolic, but if a number is given in a death-bed story, it usually has some kind of significance beyond itself as a simple number.<sup>93</sup> The ages of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph form a set that, when treated as such, mutually signify each other.<sup>94</sup> Moses' age of one hundred twenty years is the post-flood

---

Sam as subversive and applies to the text the term 'unreliable narrator.' David M. Gunn, 'New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *JSOT*, 39 (1987), 65–75; Gunn, "Threading the Labyrinth": A Response to Albert B. Lord', in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. by Susan Niditch, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 19–24. However, the concept of the unreliable narrator is most aptly applied to intradiegetic narrators (focalized or not) who either misperceive reality (e.g. due to immaturity or madness) or who deliberately misrepresent reality with an intent to deceive the reader, but through whose misrepresentations the reader is actually intended (by the author?) to see. While an unreliable extradiegetic narrator may be conceivable, the labelling of the ironic or satirical narrator as 'unreliable' adds nothing to our understanding of the text and seems practically impossible to demonstrate. The bottom line is that in order to call into question the face value of something spoken by the extradiegetic narrator, one has to demonstrate that irony plays a role in the surrounding text. A stray ironic statement is highly suspect.

<sup>92</sup> The contrast between the statement and its function in the narrative is comparable to Propp's distinction between a particular form of a function and the function itself (p. 67), or to Longacre's distinction between a narrative's surface and notional structures. Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, Topics in Language and Linguistics, 2nd edn (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), pp. 33–38. While the surface structure is simply an age notice, its placement within a narrative (especially at the beginning of this narrative segment) points to its relationship to a more constant notional element of death-bed stories: the setting of the time-frame at the point when death is (or could be) imminent.

<sup>93</sup> This is not always the case. There is no clear numerological significance to Tobit's one hundred twelve years (Tob 14.2). The death-bed stories of Elijah and Elisha contain no age or number whatsoever. Perhaps this is an intentional omission, however, given that the two prophets are presented otherwise as very mysterious figures.

<sup>94</sup> Numerological analysis of the final ages of the four chief characters of Gen 12–50 also shows a progression/connection. Abraham's lifespan of 175 =  $7 \times 5^2$ ; Isaac's 180 =  $5 \times 6^2$ ; Jacob's 147 =  $3 \times 7^2$ ; Joseph's 110 =  $1 \times (5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2)$ . See Stanley Gevirtz, 'Life Spans of Joseph and Enoch and the Parallelism: Sib Atayim-Sib Im Wesib Ah', *JBL*, 96, no. 4 (1977), pp. 570–71; James G. Williams, 'Number Symbolism and Joseph as Symbol of Completion', *JBL*, 98, no. 1 (1979), pp. 86–87; C. J.

Hebrew ideal (Genesis 6.3). Joshua, like Joseph, lives to one hundred ten years. The significance for Joshua is probably that it is equivalent to Joseph, his virtuous ancestor, rather than that it is the Egyptian ideal, as is likely the case in Genesis 50.22, 26. David's total age is not given in 1 Kings 2.11, but the number of years of his reign is forty years, a total that frequently figures as an ideal number of years for a long and peaceful time of leadership or of a calm after a decisive act of leadership (Deuteronomy 29.5; Judges 3.11, 30 [80 = 40 x 2]; 5.31; 8.28). Mattathias' age of one hundred forty-six years in 1 Maccabees 2.70 may be intentionally one less than Jacob's one hundred forty-seven, especially if the story is consciously patterned on Jacob's death-bed story.<sup>95</sup>

It is illuminating to compare the phrasing of this verse with the genealogical materials of 5.1–32 and 11.10–26, both dedicated to the chosen line, unlike the other genealogical material in the primeval prologue, *Toledot Ishmael* or *Toledot Esau*.<sup>96</sup> While there are variations, the standard form of a genealogical event within these two passages consists of: (1) an age notice before a significant event; (2) the time lived after the significant event (this event usually being the birth of the next in the

---

Labuschagne, 'The Life Span of the Patriarchs', in *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament ...*, ed. by Adam Simon van der Woude, OTS, 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 121–27; Sarna, p. 364; Hamilton, p. 709; Waltke, p. 591; et al.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary*, AB, 41 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), p. 239. Goldstein vaguely notes some similarities of Mattathias' death with Jacob's death, but focuses exclusively on Gen 49–50. Furthermore, he presumes the relationship to be one of direct imitation without considering the possible use of a conventional plot structure. While both scenes clearly follow a common structure, the specific similarities with Jacob's death are too few to support conclusively a theory of direct dependence.

<sup>96</sup> Generally speaking, the linear genealogical material in Genesis is concerned with tracing the specific chosen line, whereas the segmented material is concerned with the general or the unchosen line(s). Matthew A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the 'Toledot' Formula*, LHB/OTS, 551 (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), p. 89, says something similar when he suggests that the linear genealogies 'function to move the narrative from one key figure in the toledot scheme to another', while segmented genealogies 'are mainly concerned with figures that are not key to the narrative at all.' A simple one-to-one connection, however, would have to exclude Gen 4.17–24 from consideration.



chosen line, but in the case of Noah the flood is the defining event—9.28); (3) the total number of years lived; (4) a death notice. The entirety of *Toledot Jacob* can be understood as a variation and elaboration of this basic schema.<sup>97</sup> It diverges from the standard schema by giving not Jacob's age at its beginning but Joseph's.<sup>98</sup> What follows until 47.27 is essentially an elaboration of the significant event, comparable to the flood for Noah, but in Jacob's case that significant event is the migration to Egypt. Story-specific variations/elaborations of elements (2) and (3) are present in 47.28, including even its particular phrasing:<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> The same can be said of the Abraham and Isaac sections: (1) age before major event: 12.4 and 25.20; (2) the major event (though not the total time lived after the event): 12.5–25.6 and 25.21–35.27; (3) the total age: 25.7 and 35.28; (4) the death notice: 25.8–10 and 35.29. The Jacob story differs from these in setting his death-bed story as an elaboration of point (4), whereas the death-bed stories of both Abraham and Isaac begin and mostly conclude before point (3). The significance of this is probably mostly to be seen in the climactic effect it helps create in Jacob's death.

<sup>98</sup> This divergence probably has a reason. Following the pattern of the chosen line genealogies, if the narrative had given Jacob's age at, say, the time of the birth of Joseph, it would have implied much more about Joseph, namely that he was the next in the chosen line to the exclusion of the other brothers. On the contrary, *Toledot Jacob* generally, and the death-bed story specifically, depicts Joseph as the first among equals rather than the exclusive heir of the chosen line. If it had given Jacob's age at the time the events of ch. 37 begin, it still would have had to give Joseph's age, since his age is the more pertinent piece of information, and the narrative did not previously relate how old Jacob was at the time of Joseph's birth.

<sup>99</sup> The closeness of the phrasing in 47.28 to that of the chosen line genealogies in chs. 5 and 11 is further highlighted by the lack of such a close phrasal similarity in 25.7–11 and 50.22–26. The phrasing for elements (1), (3), and (4) are found in *Toledot Isaac* as well (25.20, 26; 35.28, 29). The duplication of element (1) may be an intentional variation of the formula where the repetition replaces element (2). Abraham's story (12.1–25.11), like Isaac's, includes motifs (1), (3), and (4) (12.4; 25.7; 25.8), while the events of Abraham's life and the frequent chronological data within obviate element (2). *Toledot Ishmael* bears partial resemblance to this formula (25.17 contains the last two elements), but overall it bears a closer resemblance to the genealogies of the unchosen lines, which are characterized by lists of sons without chronological data (4.17–24; 10.1–31; see also the sons of Qeturah in 25.1–6). *Toledot Esau* bears even less resemblance to the chosen line formula and more to the genealogies of the unchosen lines. See Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 161–63.

	Jacob (47.28)	Chosen line genealogies
Time lived after a significant event	ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה	ויחי X אחרי [event] # שנה <sup>100</sup>
Total number of years lived	ויהי ימי-יעקב שני חייו שבע שנים וארבעים ומאת שנה	ויהי/ו בל-ימי X # שנה <sup>101</sup>

Immediately following the total number of years lived in the first list (5.1–32) and in the last member of the second list (Terah in 11.32) is the word *וימת* or a phrase including it. The expectation resulting from this consistency of form is part of what makes Enoch's story in 5.21–24 surprising. Where the reader would normally find *וימת*, instead one reads *ויתהלך חנוך את-האלהים ואיננו כילקח אתו אלהים*. This, along with the absence of the death motif in most of the list in 11.10–32 and its slight augmentation in 11.32 (which creates an important sense of division in time just prior to the entry of Abraham onto centre-stage) is evidence that the death motif and indeed all the motifs of the chosen line formula were freely adapted by the author in different situations.

If this form-based expectation is present in 47.28, what the reader expects after this phrasing is the death of Jacob. But instead of a short phrase like *וימת*, what we get is an elaborate death-bed story whose structure is similar not only to other death-bed stories in Genesis but to many death-bed stories throughout Israelite and Second Temple Jewish literature. What occurs from 47.29 through at least 50.14 is an elaboration of the single anticipated word *וימת*.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Exact examples in 5.7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 26, 30; 9.28; 11.11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 25. Variations in 5.4, 22.

<sup>101</sup> Examples in 5.8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 27, 31; 9.29. Variations in 5.6 and 11.32. The second list differs from the first in only mentioning the death of the last member, Terah. From Shem to Nahor, father of Terah, no death is explicitly mentioned (but total number of years is, so death is implied).

<sup>102</sup> Janzen, p. 182; Westermann, III, 181, makes what is, in many ways, a similar observation that 'Das Ganze ist in seinem Kern nicht Erzählung, sondern Bericht, eine genealogische Nachricht vom letzten Willen, Tod und Begräbnis Jakobs, auch wenn sie in einzelnen Teilen erzählerisch ausgestaltet und der Erzählung angepaßt.'

The first half of verse 29 is also Preparatory (that is, it establishes the setting and motivation for the Testament). It is an approaching death motif, and this particular one (one of the most explicit varieties) is also found at the beginning of the second episode of David's death-bed story in 1 Kings 2.1 and in Deuteronomy 31.14 (in the voice of Yahweh, with forms adjusted for direct address).<sup>103</sup> The same phrase begins Mattathias' death-bed story in 1 Maccabees 2.49. In each case, the phrase introduces a death-bed story or an Episode within a death-bed story.

The approaching death motif in all its forms is one of the most consistent features of conventional death-bed stories.<sup>104</sup> Its function is obvious: it sets the stage and establishes the need for the Testator's Testament. The motif's position within an Episode is movable, although they occur with slightly greater frequency in the narrator's voice prior to the dying character's Testament. When they do occur in the Testament itself, they tend to occur toward its beginning.<sup>105</sup>

To summarize, Genesis 47.28–29a constitute the Preparation of the first Episode of Jacob's death-bed story. This Preparation consists of a summary of the Testator's remaining life, a total-age-at-death notice, and an approaching death motif, all of which are conventional elements. The total-age motif is usually found in the Hebrew Bible at the end of the story. Its occurrence at the beginning of the story affects its function in the narrative. As is common in death-bed stories, the number of Jacob's total age is numerologically significant. The phrasing of this whole verse recalls the genealogies of the chosen line in Genesis 5.1–32 and 11.10–26. This comparison also reveals that the death of Jacob is narrated at a different point in this

---

<sup>103</sup> As noted also by Driver, p. 375; Delitzsch, p. 504; Skinner, p. 503.

<sup>104</sup> Coats (p. 302) calls the approaching death motif 'a crucial element for farewell speeches.'

<sup>105</sup> Two apparent exceptions are Gen 48.21 and Josh 23.14. However, in both cases what is happening is the introduction of a second, closely-related Testament within a single Episode. Other factors, including the continuity of scene and addressee and the lack of other disjunctive motifs make it so that this second Testament reads like a continuation of the present Episode rather than a new Episode altogether.

schema (it is an elaboration of the fourth element) than were the deaths of Abraham and Isaac (which occur between second and third elements).

## 2.2 THE TESTAMENT (GENESIS 47.29B–31A)

The point that demarcates the transition from Preparation to Testament is the moment when the meeting between the Testator and the addressee is initiated. While it is frequently as simple as a speech introduction, often one also finds some kind of summoning formula or even a short narrative detailing the manner in which the meeting came about. The summoning formula in 47.29, ויקרא ל, is typical if not universal.<sup>106</sup>

The critical features of a summoning/speech formula are threefold. First, it designates the addressee or group of addressees and distinguishes them from those not addressed/summoned. Second, especially in the case of the summoning variety, it expresses the addressee's movement into the thematized space<sup>107</sup> near the death-bed. Third, it seems that the show of initiative by the dying character shows mental alertness, and this may be intended to connote an honourable death. In cases where the Worthy Successor or Agent initiates the meeting, the dying character often shows initiative in some other way.<sup>108</sup> Even in Genesis 27, Isaac originally takes the initiative to summon Esau. Although his initiative is overturned, he is nevertheless

---

<sup>106</sup> There does not appear to be any distinction in meaning among קרא + object preceded by prepositions ל or אל or by definite direct object marker את. In death-bed stories, one finds קרא with preposition ל in Gen 27.42 (Rebekah to Jacob); Deut 31.7; Josh 23.2; 24.1; 1 Kgs 1.28, 32; with preposition אל in Gen 28.1; 49.1; with definite direct object marker את in Gen 27.1 and Deut 31.14. This is probably the phrase behind Tob 4.3; *T. Iss.* 1.1; *T. Dan* 1.2; *T. Jos.* 1.1.

<sup>107</sup> I owe this concept to Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 132–142. Thematized space is space with semantic content, or in Bal's words 'an "acting place" rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that "this is happening here" is just as important as "the way it is here," which allows these events to happen' (p. 136).

<sup>108</sup> See section 3.1 in the following chapter.

mentally aware enough to suspect something is wrong and to try and find it out. In 47.29, Jacob shows awareness of his situation and takes the initiative to summon Joseph alone, anticipating (but not effecting) his selection as Worthy Successor in chapter 48 by drawing him into the privileged space (see section 2.2.1 below for more).<sup>109</sup>

While some kind of oath motif is found in other death-bed stories,<sup>110</sup> the particular ritual of someone placing his hand under the thigh of the dying character is unique to Genesis 24.2–3, 9 and 47.29.<sup>111</sup> Aspects of Jacob and Joseph's dialogue show a formality to the occasion, specifically the formulaic request phrase **אִם־נָא** **מֵצֵאתִי הֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ**<sup>112</sup> and Joseph's use of the emphatic first person personal pronoun,

---

<sup>109</sup> De Hoop, pp. 326–27. See also B. J. van der Merwe, 'Joseph as Successor of Jacob', in *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Theodoro Christiano Vriezen [...] dedicata* (Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, 1966), pp. 221–32 (pp. 225–26).

<sup>110</sup> Elsewhere in Gen 24.1–9; 50.25; Josh 24.16–27. In 1 Kgs 1.29–30, the oath has been made (assuming the veracity of the oath, which I do) and is fulfilled by the Testator rather than the Successor or the Agent. The oath's function in the story, however, is comparable, in that it is invoked as an assurance that the Testator's will will be done.

<sup>111</sup> The only recoverable significance of this ritual is that it is an oath. What this oath signifies, if anything, is unclear. Scholars by default tend to perpetuate the suggestion that it is calling down a curse on the oath-taker's own reproductive system should he fail in his sworn duty. See e.g. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 178; Wenham, II, 141; Matthews II, 327; Gottfried Vanoni, 'שֵׁם', *TDOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 89–112. But this is entirely speculative. There is no way to verify what participants in this oath ritual would have been thinking or feeling, no way to verify what an original significance of the ritual may have been, and no way to verify that even the author of Genesis knew its significance. There is no guarantee that the Israelite/Jewish community of the time of the author would have used this oath ritual. In light of the fact that this oath is only connected with patriarchal traditions, it seems more likely that this oath was a relic of the ancient past by the time of the writing of Genesis. Social rituals, like words, survive beyond their original settings and are not perpetuated only when the original meaning of that ritual is understood. See Frits Staal, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen*, 26, no. 1 (1979), pp. 2–22.

<sup>112</sup> Wilson, p. 195; Wenham, II, 450.

which can be interpreted as contractual language.<sup>113</sup> Legal ritual or ritualistic language is an important feature of several death-bed stories.<sup>114</sup>

In Genesis 24.1–9 and 47.28–31, the swearing of an oath to the Testator is a means of guaranteeing the accomplishment of something the Testator needs in order to finish putting his house in order but over which he has no direct control because of its probably or even necessarily posthumous nature. The oath gives assurance that it will be done, making it possible for the Testator to die in peace. In Abraham's case, the acquisition of a wife for Isaac is his duty, but the death-bed setting of 24.1–9 may imply that he is too weak or that his death is too near to accomplish this duty on his own.<sup>115</sup> In the cases of Jacob and Joseph, the oath has to do with their burial, which obviously must be accomplished posthumously. Their deaths are unique among all the extant examples of the Hebrew death-bed story in that they die far from the homeland. To die far from the homeland, especially if it means burial in the distant land (or lack of burial), was felt across the ancient Near East to be a feature of a cursed death.<sup>116</sup> This explains both why an oath was imposed (it gives sufficient

---

<sup>113</sup> A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), p. 151–2: '[T]he expression of the pron. gives force or solemnity to the whole phrase, which is emphatic.' See also Gen 21.24; 38.17; Judg 6.18; 11.9; II Sam 3.13; 21.6; I Kgs 5.22; II Kgs 6.3. These examples are often a formal acquiescence to a request from an inferior (or at least one of not greater social standing), and several are a formal acquiescence to a request for a covenant or monetary transaction.

<sup>114</sup> The oath in 24.1–9 is a clear example. Gen 27 has been read as a blessing ritual (Westermann, II (1981), 529–530; Keukens, 43–56). Deut 31–34 deals with several issues that are legal/ritual in nature, including the official selection by YHWH of Joshua as leader after Moses. Josh 24 follows a covenant initiation pattern (see ch. 3). The interaction between Bathsheba and David or Nathan and David in I Kgs 1 is formal, and the resolution is an enthronement ritual. Elisha's prophetic instructions to Josiah in II Kgs 13 are ritualistic.

<sup>115</sup> Commonly observed. See, for example, Skinner, p. 341; Speiser, p. 183; Von Rad, p. 255; Matthews, II, 326.

<sup>116</sup> Two examples show this well. In the Neo-Assyrian text, 'The Sin of Sargon', the salient features of Sargon's death that motivate Sennacherib's desire to appease the gods appear to be that he died in battle and far from home, both being important features of a shameful death. Hayim Tadmor, Benno Landsberger, and Simo Parpola, 'The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will', *SAAB*, 3 (1989), 3–51. Secondly, in the Egyptian 'Tale of Sinuhe', after leading a long and prosperous life in exile, Sinuhe is invited back to Egypt. His desire to die and be buried in his homeland is so strong that he chooses to leave his family and the life he has built in order to return to Egypt to live out his final

assurance to allow the character to die in peace) and why burial requests are not found in other death-bed stories.

### 2.2.1 JOSEPH AS A WORTHY SUCCESSOR

The role of Joseph in this and the following Episodes accords with a stock character found in many Hebrew death-bed stories. Propp observed that functions that make up the typical structure of Russian fairy tales are performed by certain kinds of stock characters or tale-roles (*dramatis personae* in Propp's terms).<sup>117</sup> The tale-role is, in fact, part of what defines a function, according to Propp (p. 20). A very similar reality holds true in conventional Hebrew death-bed stories. There are certain kinds of roles that recur, and regardless of who is filling a given role, many (if not most) of the actions that character performs are common to the role. In death-bed stories, there are four kinds of roles: the Testator, the Worthy Successor, the Unworthy Competitor, and the Agent. Each role has typical actions and characteristics. Many of those of the Testator are obvious. He/she is the one who is dying, who makes his/her will known, and who makes provision for that will's accomplishment. The more specific recurring features of the Testator will be discussed as they become relevant.

On the other hand, the conventional features of the other roles are not always so obvious. A typical theme of death-bed Episodes is the Testator's selection of successor, generally from among two or more options. The most fully formed outworkings of this theme are found in the death-bed stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David (1 Kings), Elijah, and Elisha, although aspects of the Selection of a Worthy Successor can be found in the death-bed stories/final addresses of Joseph,

---

days. Cyrus H. Gordon, 'The Marriage and Death of Sinuhe', in *Life & Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. by John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, Connecticut: Four Quarters, 1987), pp. 43–44.

<sup>117</sup> One might also refer to them as 'actors', following Greimas (p. 200) and Bal (pp. 195–208). However, unlike Greimas and Bal, I want to be clear that I am not implying anything more universal about these stock characters than their role in the conventional death-bed story.

Moses, Joshua, and Mattathias.<sup>118</sup> Those who are designated as Successors tend to share in certain characteristics that are listed below. The other options, those who are not selected by the Testator, are given essentially the opposite characteristics. These are the ones I have called Unworthy Competitors. In addition, a Worthy Successor sometimes has another character working on his behalf, an Agent. The characterisation of the Agent is essentially identical to that of the Worthy Successor, though when an Agent takes on certain characteristics, they seem to do so in place of the Successor. For example, if an Agent takes on the characteristic of initiative, the Successor will seem reticent or passive in comparison (see section 3.4.4). The following seven characteristics and their counterparts designate the Worthy Successor (or his Agent) and the Unworthy Competitor, respectively (note: the examples I give in this list mostly ignore the characteristics' occurrences within Jacob's death-bed story—this I leave to be explored in the following chapters):

- (1) Intuitive or exclusive knowledge of the Testator and his will. Unworthy Competitors, by contrast, display a lack of this knowledge. In the case of Isaac's death-bed story, Jacob becomes more knowledgeable, whereas Esau begins knowledgeable but is rendered out of the loop by subsequent events. Bathsheba and Nathan, acting as Agents on Solomon's behalf, claim to have special knowledge of David's will for royal succession. Elisha intuitively (prophetically?) knows about Elijah's coming assumption before the sons of the prophets tell him.
- (2) An appropriate mix of initiative and obedience. The initiative taken by a Worthy Successor or his Agent is expressed in approaching the Testator

---

<sup>118</sup> See chapters four and five (esp. section 4.3) for more about some of the variations of the Worthy Successor theme involving corporate or tiered succession.



to await a pronouncement (Rebekah helps Jacob approach Isaac; Bathsheba and Nathan approach David on behalf of Solomon; Elisha stays close to Elijah) and in displaying a value for what the dying character has to pass on (Isaac loves Rebekah, the gift of Abraham, in Genesis 24.67; Jacob values the birthright while Esau despises it; Elisha asks for a double portion). However, the Worthy Successor waits until the pronouncement to act overtly as Worthy Successor. Sometimes, a Worthy Successor or Agent acts in a way that exceeds or even contradicts the expressed wishes of the dying character. In those cases, however, by doing so they actually accomplish the more fundamental interests or wishes of the dying character (Jacob and Rebekah subvert Isaac's plan, but it is in accordance with the oracle from YHWH; Elisha disobeys Elijah's instructions to wait in different places). This feature connects with the intuitive knowledge characteristic. By contrast, initiative displayed by Unworthy Competitors is inappropriate or presumptuous, interestingly, even when obedient. Rather than coming near the dying character, the Unworthy Competitor presumes to be the successor without hearing such a pronouncement from the dying character, or he attempts to act overtly as Worthy Successor without receiving a commission (Adonijah's presumption and celebration away from king David; Esau's attempt to fulfil Isaac's command to Jacob about getting a non-Canaanite wife).

- (3) The Worthy Successor or his Agent inhabits or moves into the thematized space near the death-bed. By contrast, Unworthy Competitors are located away from the death-bed. The clearest examples of this opposition are Jacob/Esau, Bathsheba/Adonijah, and Elisha/the sons of the prophets. Note, however, the way the sons of Qeturah are sent away. This spatial characterization is consistent with their brief role as Unworthy Competitors.
- (4) The Worthy Successor or his Agent is often given the role of executor of the dying character's will. Accompanying this role one often finds a negotiation or oath motif—dialogue which formalises some kind of contract. Examples are Genesis 24.1–9; 28.1–5; I Kings 2.1–9; II Kings 2.9–10. Elisha's prophetic instructions to Joash and Joash's resultant destiny to defeat Syria three times fall into this category, as well.
- (5) The Worthy Successor is also sometimes mentioned by name as mourning for the deceased character (Elisha and Joash: 'My father, my father ...'; Joseph in Genesis 50.1).<sup>119</sup>
- (6) The very possession of an Agent may be a characteristic of the Worthy Successor. So far, I have found that only a Worthy Successor will have a party acting on his behalf (Abraham's servant for Isaac; Rebekah for Jacob and not for Esau; Bathsheba and Nathan for Solomon, while

---

<sup>119</sup> Isaac's grief for his mother, mentioned in Gen 24.67, is a variation of this characteristic. Mourning seems most appropriately to happen after the death of the Testator, as witnessed not only by Joseph and Elisha, but also by the timing of the mourning of the Egyptians for Jacob (Gen 50.3), the Israelites for Moses (34.8), and the Israelites for Samuel (I Sam 25.1). Joash's weeping before the death of Elisha in II Kgs 13.14 may be intended to strike the reader as awkward or poorly-timed.

Adonijah exalts himself), though it is certainly possible that if other examples of this type-scene used to exist, the Unworthy Competitor might have had a proxy, as well. But from the extant examples, I have to conclude that having an Agent working on one's behalf is in itself a part of the characterisation and validation of the Worthy Successor.

- (7) Finally, the approval of Yahweh for the Worthy Successor is usually indicated, somehow. It can be either explicit or implicit, and it sometimes is part of the characterization of the Worthy Successor prior to the death-bed story.<sup>120</sup>

The depiction of Joseph as Worthy Successor in Jacob's death-bed story is a continuation of his characterization as such throughout *Toledot Jacob*. The favour of Jacob for Joseph and their closeness, as told in Genesis 37 and revisited throughout *Toledot Jacob*, distinguishes Joseph as Worthy Successor. He has special knowledge and is given special authority by Jacob. He is obedient to his father, even at the expense of his relationship with his brothers (37.2). Assuming the innocence of Joseph (i.e. he does not make up his dreams but genuinely receives them from YHWH), his dreams function like the oracle to Rebekah in 25.23, predicting YHWH's favour.

However, the depiction of Joseph as Worthy Successor becomes very clear in Jacob's death-bed story.<sup>121</sup> In both of the first two Episodes, Joseph alone among his

---

<sup>120</sup> Gen 25.11: YHWH blessed Isaac. Gen 28.10–35.26 is mostly concerned with the way YHWH blessed and preserved Jacob. Deut 34.9 says Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom. Solomon's characterization both before and after David's death-bed story indicates God's favour and blessing (II Sam 12.24–25; I Kgs 3.3–15). See also II Kgs 2.14, 19–25; II Kgs 13.24–25.

<sup>121</sup> B. J. van der Merwe ('Joseph as Successor', 221–32) draws his clues for this interpretation not from the conventional depiction of the Worthy Successor, but just on the evidence of a plain reading of, especially, 47.29–48.22. See also Errol M. McGuire, 'The Joseph Story: A Tale of Father and Son', in *Images of Man and God: Old Testament Short Stories in Literary Focus*, ed. by Burke O. Long,

brothers is the addressee and enters into the privileged space (Manasseh and Ephraim being an extension of Joseph). The burial request that is given to Joseph is an executor duty. In the second Episode, Joseph comes into possession of knowledge not widely known. The servant does not tell the other eleven, or if we are to understand that he does, the focus is on Joseph coming into possession of this knowledge. He takes the initiative to come to Jacob's bedside even before he is summoned. Moreover, the way Jacob responds indicates that he does not consider Joseph's initiative presumptuous. In the second Episode, as well, Joseph acts doubly as Worthy Successor and as Agent to Ephraim and Manasseh (also depicted as Worthy Successors; see chapter 3).

In other death-bed stories, the actions and duties of a Successor, including executor duties, are assigned to and performed by the Successor after he has been formally selected. The blessing and commission of Jacob by Isaac in 28.1–4 is a blessing of the Worthy Successor and assumes his selection as such (it is not the speech-act that enacts it). In any case, Jacob's accomplishment of those tasks certainly comes after his formal selection. In I Kings 1–2 the selection of Solomon as king in chapter one precedes the tasks charged to him in chapter two, tasks which are his by virtue of his status as successor to David. Elisha's actions following the assumption of Elijah (II Kings 2.13–25) all show him to be acting as successor to Elijah, and he only performs such actions after Elijah's ascent. Similarly, while king Joash is an imperfect example of a Worthy Successor, his military victories over Syria in the last part of II Kings 13 are directly related to his characterization in Elisha's death-bed story (even if it is an ironically aborted selection). Joseph, on the other hand, is given tasks usually given to a Worthy Successor even though he has

---

BiLiSe (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), pp. 9–25 (p. 18). De Hoop supports viewing Joseph as Jacob's successor, in the first two Episodes, but his interpretation of ראש המטה ('the head of the tribe') is impossible. See next footnote.

not yet been formally selected as such. This anticipates his formal selection in chapter 48 and ties the first two Episodes together.

In summary, verses 29b–31a contain the Testament material of this Episode and consist of two conventional features of death-bed stories: a summoning formula and an oath motif. As a result of these features, Joseph is depicted in the tale-role of the Worthy Successor without yet having been formally selected as such. The oath-swearing, which is necessitated by the posthumous nature of what is being requested, exhibits features of formality or legal procedure.

## 2.3 THE DENOUEMENT (GENESIS 47.31B)

Death-bed episodes are frequently concluded by a short statement in the narrator's voice whose content is contextually dependent, a section I call the Denouement. The precise concluding phrase in verse 31b, וישתחו ישראל על־ראש המטה, is unique in the Hebrew Bible, but a similar phrase וישתחו המלך על־המשכב occurs in David's death-bed story in 1 Kings 1.47 after David hears the news that Solomon has successfully assumed the throne. Like Jacob, he is bound to the bed by weakness, and, also like Jacob, he desires to express physically his sense of relief and gratitude that his death-bed wishes have been accomplished.

More important, however, than the phrase as a whole is the image of the bed. The bed is a part of a group of related visual motifs commonly found in death-bed stories which describe the dying character's situation and condition. Not every death-bed story actually features a bed, but many do or at least imply it. In the Hebrew Bible, in addition to Genesis 47.31b, a bed also appears in 48.2 (where Jacob strengthens himself to sit up) and 49.33 (where Jacob pulls his feet into the bed and then dies).<sup>122</sup> *Testament of Levi* 19.4 and Tobit 14.11 also explicitly mention a bed in

<sup>122</sup> The question of whether מטה should be vocalized along with MT as *miṭṭāh* 'bed' or with Gr. and Syr. as *maṭṭēh* 'rod' would appear to be settled in 49.33 in favour of the MT reading, and scholars

relation to a death-bed story. In other stories in the Hebrew Bible, the explicit presence of a bed is often associated with death, the nearness of death, or at least sickness.<sup>123</sup>

The position of a dying character on a bed can also be implied through certain standard actions. In relation to his bed Jacob sits up (48.3) and pulls in his feet (49.33). The oath in 24.1–9 and 47.28–31 involves placing one's hand under the thigh of the Testator, a motion that makes best sense visually if the Testator is sitting or lying down. The dying character also sits up, or is instructed to do so, in Genesis 27.19, *Testament of Reuben* 1.4–5, and *Testament of Simeon* 1.2. Some kind of action relating to feet occurs in the *Testaments of Levi, Issachar, Gad, and Joseph*. Whether they stretch them out or draw them up, actions relating to feet directly precede death in each of these stories, and in the *Testament of Levi* it specifically says that he does

---

generally agree on this. See Procksch, p. 267–68; Driver, p. 375; König, p. 717; Westermann, III, 183; Sarna, p. 324; et al. Waltke (p. 592) is a rare exception. De Hoop ponders another possibility for על־ראש המטה which would support B. J. van der Merwe's ('Joseph as Successor', 221–32) understanding of 47.29–31 as itself describing the selection of Joseph as Jacob's successor. The verb חוה when followed by preposition על on rare occasions means 'bow to', and ראש המטה is used on a number of occasions to refer to the head of one of the tribes. The whole phrase would then be rendered 'Israel bowed to the head of the tribe [Joseph].' This is also suggested as a possibility by Rashi, *Genesis*, trans. by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A. M. Silbermann, Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1929), p. 238. However, several factors speak against this: (1) I can find no other instance where *matteh* in the singular refers to all Israelites; (2) the other two occurrences of מטה in Jacob's death-bed story refer to a bed (unless one wishes to maintain that 48.2 is a third distinct meaning and refers to Jacob's staff—clearly the most difficult reading of the final form); (3) an almost identical phrase in 1 Kgs 1.47 clearly describes bowing on a bed; (4) the conventions relating to the selection of Joseph as Worthy Successor do not actually occur until ch. 48 (this last point by itself, obviously, would be begging the question, but it is mentioned here as corroboration). This proposal is, therefore, unsustainable. De Hoop, interestingly, rejects this reading in his synchronic interpretation but accepts it in his diachronic interpretation, apparently meaning that he thinks the unvocalized word was misunderstood or intentionally transformed when the final form was put together. De Hoop, *Genesis* 49, pp. 329–31, 462; idem., "'Then Israel Bowed Himself ...' (Genesis 47.31)", *JSOT*, 28 (2004), 467–480.

<sup>123</sup> For example, 1 Sam 19.13–14; 1 Kgs 17.19; 2 Kgs 1.4; 2 Kgs 4.21. David's weakness, the fact that Abishag's purpose in 1 Kgs 1 is to lie with David in order to help him regulate his temperature, and Bathsheba's movement into David's chamber in 1.15 almost certainly situate David on a bed. His bowing on המשכב verifies it.

so on his bed. Some other actions happen in death-bed stories which may imply a bed, like Hezekiah's turning to the wall in II Kings 20.2 (this is, at least, the way I visualize the story; admittedly, there is not enough data in the text to say anything about Hezekiah's position with certainty). Regardless, it is clear that the motivic elements of 'bed', 'sitting up', and 'feet' are commonly present in relation to the death of a character. Furthermore, this motif group as a whole, and the 'bed' image specifically, is not inherently connected to any part of the death-bed story, but there is something of a tendency for 'sitting up' images to occur at the beginning of the story and 'feet' images at the end of the story.

Exactly how one should visualize Jacob's action of bowing down on his bed is unclear, but some kind of full prostration while situated in bed is intended. The reason why Jacob does so on his bed is simply that he is, both here and in chapter 48, very weak with old age.<sup>124</sup> The problem of visualization is, in any case, a red herring.<sup>125</sup> What is important is what the word וישתחו<sup>126</sup> accomplishes socially and narratologically. First of all, why does Jacob bow down, or what is the emotion he is expressing? That he is falling back onto his bed in relief is a possibility.<sup>127</sup> This would be consistent with the significance of the oath, so prominent in this episode, as a post-mortem guarantee of the accomplishment of Jacob's will. But חוה generally communicates more intention than would be indicated by a relieved collapse, for

---

<sup>124</sup> Herbert Donner, *Die literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephsgeschichte*, SHAW.PH, 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976), p. 31 (n. 50); Sarna, p. 324; Wenham, II, 450.

<sup>125</sup> Speiser (*Genesis*, p. 357) observes rightly, 'The trouble derives in all probability from taking the Heb. stem too literally.'

<sup>126</sup> I follow the more recent trend in understanding וישתחו as a Hištap'el of חוה (*HALOT*) or חוי (Joüon §79 *t*) rather than traditional Hitpa'el of שחה (*DCH*; *BDB*; *GKC* §75 *kk*).

<sup>127</sup> Arnold, p. 372; NEB translation seems to imply this reading: 'Israel sank down over the end of his bed'. Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, JSOTSup, 96 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 163, 166, interprets it as exhaustion.

which we might expect, for example, נפל (Genesis 33.4; 45.14; 46.29; 50.1) with על למטה or למשכב (Exodus 21.18).<sup>128</sup>

One common understanding is that Jacob is offering worship to God in thankfulness.<sup>129</sup> This is apparently confirmed by 1 Kings 1.47 where David bows on his bed. It is important, however, not to conflate the coincidence of words or ideas with synonymy of meaning. Just because bowing and prayerful thanksgiving frequently occur in concert does not mean that bowing itself is prayerful thanksgiving. It is true that meanings are not simply located at the word level but in the sentence and beyond. Even so, one can generally distinguish what a word brings to a context from the total contextual meaning.<sup>130</sup> The verb חוה only means ‘worship’ secondarily. Rather, חוה essentially describes a physical action (full body prostration), albeit one that occurs in certain settings, for example, in obeisance to Yahweh or human potentates.<sup>131</sup>

Where reverence to YHWH is intended as the contextual significance of the physical act, accompanying words are generally present to express this. In 1 Kings 1.48, for example, David actually pronounces a *berakah* to Yahweh, clarifying the

---

<sup>128</sup> For this reason, as well, Blum’s interpretation of the phrase as a reference to Jacob’s actual death is unlikely. To explain why the verb חוה would be used in such an unusual way, Blum notes the verbal parallel with Gen 37.9, but here Blum’s logic breaks down. If the verb requires an exceptional illocutionary force in order to mean Jacob’s death, the inevitability of Blum’s interpretation is seriously weakened, and this detail no longer supports the diachronic weight he places on it (i.e. contrasting with 48.1 where Jacob is alive). Blum, p. 250. See also Donner, *Gestalt*, p. 31; Redford, p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Rashi, p. 238; Dillmann, p. 425; Delitzsch, p. 505; Heinisch, p. 405; Ruppert, p. 168; Vawter, p. 451; Davidson, p. 293; Westermann, III, 206; Lowenthal, p. 133; Wilson, p. 196; also a handful of English translations including NASB (surprisingly, given its rigid formal equivalence methodology), NIV, and BBE.

<sup>130</sup> In Greimas’ terms, the distinction between a contextual meaning and what a word brings to that context is a distinction between a lexeme’s semic nucleus and the sememe, or the combined meaning produced by a semic nucleus and semic variables in a context (pp. 49–50).

<sup>131</sup> *HALOT* compares חוה to Ugaritic *y/tšthwy* (to be prostrate before) and Arabic *ḥwy* (to curl up), both of which indicate physical acts. BDB only includes ‘worship’ as part of its contextual force. See also de Hoop, pp. 328–29, 331–32. Friedman, p. 156, and the RSV/NRSV correctly translate as a physical action.



meaning of his bowing in verse 47.<sup>132</sup> It is noteworthy that the verb is never used transitively, but when Yahweh is the expressed object, the word is always prefaced by a preposition, often ל (as in I Samuel 1.3; 15.25; and elsewhere). In I Kings 1.47, the only possible object is Yahweh, but in Genesis 47.31 Joseph is present and an obvious potential object. It is possible (though I think less likely) that Jacob is bowing to (i.e. giving thanks to) Yahweh, but even if he is, the English word ‘worship’ should be reserved for other, more specifically cultic contexts.

In light of all this, the best understanding of the phrase is that Jacob is expressing gratitude to Joseph who is his political superior and who is the only one with sufficient authority to make his dying wishes a reality.<sup>133</sup> This option is especially appealing in light of the fact that the phrase אֲנִי מֵצֵאִיךָ חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ, or something like it, is usually spoken by someone in a position of inferiority.<sup>134</sup>

Jacob’s grateful response to Joseph brings the scene and the social ritual to a close.<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, however, just like the assigning of executor duties to Joseph

---

<sup>132</sup> This is the majority view. A. Graeme Auld, *Kings*, DSB (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1986), p. 11, on the other hand, suggests that David’s bowing is actually directed toward Solomon despite the following *berakah*.

<sup>133</sup> The majority of commentators opt for something like this. Rashi, pp. 237–8; Procksch, p. 268; König, p. 717; Von Rad, p. 414; Redford, p. 2; Vawter, p. 451; Westermann, III, 183–4; Janzen, p. 184; de Hoop, p. 327. Noteworthy also is the lack of the verb צוה, which characterizes Jacob’s charge to the gathered sons on precisely the same topic in 49.29. The verb צוה always implies that the speaker is situationally superior to the addressee. Westermann, II, 545. Ackerman and Wenham (II, 450) suggest that there is an intentional ambiguity in the target of Jacob’s thanksgiving. James S. Ackerman, ‘Joseph, Judah, and Jacob’, in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, Volume II* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 85–113 (pp. 108–9). While it is certainly possible for the narrator to use intentional ambiguity, this would be a rather impotent use of a *double entendre*. See also Schmitt, p. 67, (n. 275). The context requires no thanksgiving to God and supports it toward Joseph.

<sup>134</sup> Procksch, p. 268. See, for example, Gen 6.8; 18.3; 19.19; 30.27; 32.5; 33.8, 10, 15; 34.11; 47.25; Exod 33.12–13; Num 11.11, 15; 32.5; Deut 24.1; Judg 6.17; Ruth 2.10, 13; I Sam 1.18; 16.22; 20.3, 29; 25.8; 27.5; II Sam 14.22; 15.25; 16.4; 11.19; Esth 7.3. The inferiority/superiority can be based on many different factors (hospitality situations, etiquette, political status, male/female relationships, etc.). It is not necessarily static, but different situations place people who would usually be superior in positions of inferiority. Whatever the basis for the distinction, the one who is inferior in a situation finds favour (or does not find favour) in the eyes of the one who is superior.

<sup>135</sup> In this aspect I would differ with Horst Seebaß, ‘The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process’, *JSOT*, 35 (1986), pp. 29–43 (p. 29), who asserts, based on a comparison with I Kgs 1.47,

before his formal selection creates a conventional imbalance, the bowing of a father to his son leaves a social imbalance. Jacob, the elder and, in most cases, superior has humbled himself through speech and action. Both tensions in the story need to be resolved, and they find their resolution in chapter 48.<sup>136</sup> The significance of this observation is that one cannot truly treat 47.28–31 as an independent story unit. Rather, it requires resolution in the form of a formal selection of Joseph as Worthy Successor (and, therefore, executor) and of a rebalancing of the social scales in the direction of Jacob's superiority. This will be accomplished in chapter 48 through the outworking of the Selection of the Worthy Successor theme and through the repetition of the verb חוה in 48.12, this time performed by Joseph toward Jacob.

This action also recalls and fulfils the second of the two dreams of Joseph from 37.9.<sup>137</sup> The connection is intentional and is made clear through the use of the

---

that the bowing action does not act as a conclusion for the narrative of 47.28–31, but only as the beginning of subsequent action. The most natural way to read 47.31 is, in fact, as a mini-conclusion, but this is not mutually exclusive with other aspects of Seebaß's comments. In fact, I whole-heartedly agree with Seebaß that '47.31 makes little sense without Gen 48', but my reasons for agreeing with that statement are different from those of Seebaß.

<sup>136</sup> Franz Steiner, 'Enslavement and the Early Hebrew Lineage System: An Explanation of Genesis 47.29–31, 48.1–16', *Man*, 54 (1954), pp. 73–75, suggests that the sale of Joseph into slavery severed his legal connection to the family line. Socially speaking, then, Jacob is speaking to one who is no longer his son, and his only legal relationship to Joseph at this point is that of any other immigrant to Egypt. (This may also provide alternate motivation for the adoption of Joseph's sons in ch. 48.) Even if this is the case, from Jacob's and Joseph's emotional perspectives within the narrative they still regard each other as father and son. Jacob is called Joseph's father or Joseph is called Jacob's son (either by the narrator or a character) 26 times, by my count, in the death-bed story alone. This does not count the many other times prior to the death-bed story but after Joseph's enslavement that they are thus referred to, nor does it count the number of times the eleven sons are called Joseph's brothers. So while Jacob's deference may make legal sense from an historical point of view, the narrative knows nothing of such a change in legal relationship between Jacob and Joseph. The bowing, therefore, arguably still upsets the implied reader's sense of propriety on an emotional level.

<sup>137</sup> Redford, pp. 2, 68–71; Ackerman, pp. 85–113; Blum, p. 250 (n. 38); Amos, p. 265; Janzen, p. 184; Matthews, II, 862–63; de Hoop, p. 329. This interestingly missed, however, by most commentators. The first dream, which only referred to the brothers, can be understood as having been fulfilled in 42.6, 43.26 and 43.28. The reason it has been missed by many may be partially due to older source-critical trends that attributed the dreams to an E layer of the Joseph story, while 47.29–31 is attributed to J—the coat is supposedly the unifying theme of the J story, the dreams of the E story. See Gunkel, p. 364; Procksch, pp. 225–26, 384–86. Redford sees the thematic recapitulation even though he holds the diachronic distinction between dream sections (original 'Reuben' story) and coat sections

verb חוה. While חוה is not an unusual word, there are other common ways of describing prostration. Genesis 50.18, for example, says of the brothers ויפלּוּ לפניו with essentially the same meaning and social context. Occurrences of the verb חוה in Genesis are slightly more concentrated in chapters 37–50 than in the rest of the book. Out of a total of twenty-three occurrences, nine appear in *Toledot Jacob*, seven of which are concerned with Joseph's dreams and the bowing of the eleven brothers and Jacob to Joseph in fulfilment of the dreams.<sup>138</sup> Of the other two, 48.12 (discussed below) balances the social scale when Joseph bows to Jacob. The last, 49.8, occurs in the poetic blessing (so its vocabulary usage is atypical and statistically less important) and speaks of the brothers bowing to Judah (in prediction of the Davidic monarchy). Therefore, despite the commonness of חוה, one is nevertheless justified in treating it as thematic in *Toledot Jacob*, and the occurrence in 47.31 is clearly a fulfilment of the second dream in Genesis 37.

In summary, the narrator's concluding statement in verse 31b concerning Jacob bowing to Joseph, regardless of the problems of its visualization, is both a conventional feature of death-bed stories in general (as an action relating to and implying the death-bed itself) and a thematic action in *Toledot Jacob* (bowing, חוה, pointing back to 37.9). This action leaves the story socially unbalanced toward Joseph.

---

(‘Judah’ expansion). Diachronic differentiation is not the reason, however, for Turner (*Announcements*, pp. 163, 166), who specifically rejects the idea that 47.31 has anything to do with this plot on synchronic grounds. The prostration in 47.31 is Jacob collapsing in exhaustion. Joseph's bowing in 48.12, on the other hand, is an ironic reversal of the theme, where the callous Joseph ‘receives his come-uppance, to the delight of the reader.’ There are numerous problems with Turner's reading, most deriving from his unwarranted tendency to read Jacob and Joseph in the most negative light possible. In order to support such a negative reading, he suppresses the greater weight of contextual clues. He claims that he is attempting to read as a first-time reader (p. 17; this is a goal of questionable justification—the implied reader of Biblical texts is arguably not primarily someone unfamiliar with the stories), but this turns out as a wilful reading against the grain.

<sup>138</sup> Three occurrences in ch. 37, three in chs. 42–43, and one in 47.31.

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

The first Episode of Jacob's death-bed story, Genesis 47.28–31, is a collection of creatively implemented conventional elements. Genesis 47.28 consists of two motifs, both of which are conventional elements of the death-bed type-scene: a summary of Jacob's remaining life after its last significant event and a notice of Jacob's total age at death. There is no compelling reason based on problems in a synchronic reading for positing competing chronologies underneath the present story. Rather, any discrepancy between anticipations of Jacob's immediate death upon arriving in Egypt and his enduring seventeen more years is better understood as a contrast between character expectation and the actual unfolding of events. The second element, the total age motif, connects Jacob's death-bed story with the larger structural schema of Genesis in that it is numerologically significant only when taken as part of the set of the ages of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Taken as a whole, verse 28 recalls the chosen line genealogies of 5.1–32 and 11.10–26. Through this connection, Jacob's entire death-bed story can be seen as an elaboration of the word *וימת*. Genesis 47.29a finishes the Preparation with an approaching death motif in the voice of the narrator.

Two standard death-bed conventions appear in 47.29b–31b: an approaching death motif, a summoning formula and an oath motif. The oath is imposed because the subject of this Episode is a burial request—something which must be accomplished posthumously but which is essential for Jacob's house to be fully set in order. Joseph is given the task of chief executor of Jacob's will even though he has not formally been selected as Worthy Successor, one of four tale-roles that function in Hebrew death-bed stories. This unbalances the story and points forward to the following Episode where his selection will be formalized.

Jacob's bowing on his bed in 47.31b functions on several different levels. The image of the bed and certain actions related to it, like bowing, are typical motifs of

death-bed stories. The verb חוה has special thematic quality in Genesis 37–50 in connection with Joseph's dreams and their fulfilment. Here, the bowing action not only brings the scene to a close, but, like the assigning of executor duties to Joseph, it unbalances the story socially and anticipates 48.12–20 when the scales will be rebalanced in Jacob's favour.

# 3 THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH

Genesis 48.1–22

## 3.0 TEXT AND PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1 ויהי<sup>139</sup> אחרי הדברים האלה ויאמר<sup>140</sup> ליוסף הנה אביך חלה ויקח את־שני בניו עמו את־מנשה ואת־אפרים<sup>141</sup>: 2 ויגד ליעקב ויאמר<sup>142</sup> הנה בנך יוסף בא אליך ויתחזק ישראל וישב על־המטה: 3 ויאמר<sup>143</sup> יעקב אל־יוסף אל שדי נראה־אלי בלזו בארץ כנען ויברך אתי: 4 ויאמר אלי הנני מפרך והרביתך ונתתיך לקהל עמים ונתתי את־הארץ הזאת לזרעך אחריך אחוזת עולם: 5 ועתה שני־בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים עד־באי אליך מצרימה ל־יהם אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו־לי: 6 ומולדתך אשר־הולדת אחריהם לך יהיו על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם: 7 ואני בבאי מפדן<sup>144</sup> מתה עלי רחל<sup>145</sup> בארץ כנען בדרך בעוד כברת־ארץ לבא אפרתה אקברה שם בדרך

<sup>139</sup> Because of the length of this chapter, in addition to putting the text and translation of the entirety of Gen 48, with text critical notes, here at the beginning of the chapter, the text of each subsection will be reprinted at the relevant points below, without text-critical notes, as an aid to the reader.

<sup>140</sup> Gr., Syr., Vulg., Tg. Ps.-J. read וַיֹּאמְרוּ (Niphal impf) for וַיֹּאמֶר (Qal impf). Either is grammatically acceptable in Biblical Hebrew, and the meaning is ultimately unchanged.

<sup>141</sup> Gr. adds ἦλθεν πρὸς Ιακωβ (ויבא אל יעקב) to the end of the verse, making explicit what is implied in the text.

<sup>142</sup> The BHS critical apparatus suggests, based on Gr., correcting the MTs vocalization to וַיֹּגֵד לְיַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר. As in v. 1, the impersonal active voice is idiomatic in Biblical Hebrew, but not in Greek (hence the change in voice in translation), so no correction of MT is necessary.

<sup>143</sup> There is no grammatical foundation for Waltke's reading (pp. 594-95) of vv. 3-7 as an analepsis, as spoken to Joseph at an earlier point and here recollected by the narrator. The *wayyiqtol* form cannot function as a pluperfect independently, but requires for this aspect a preceding *qatal* form. This is Waltke's attempt to reconcile the reasons for the typical diachronic distinctions in this text with a thoroughly synchronic reading. There is no need for this, however. The narrative is not particularly disrupted by the apparent insertion of foreign material. A chronological distinction in narrated time between vv. 3-7 and the surrounding narrative is the wrong direction to take, in any case.

<sup>144</sup> Sam., Gr., and Syr. add אַרְם, harmonizing with the ten other instance of פֶּדָן in Gen.

<sup>145</sup> Sam. and Gr. add אִמְךָ—'your mother.' Entirely possible, but not critical.

אפרת<sup>146</sup> הוא בית לחם: 8 וירא ישראל את־בני יוסף ויאמר מי־אלה<sup>147</sup>: 9 ויאמר יוסף אל־אביו בני הם אשר־נתן־לי אלהים בזה ויאמר קח־נא אלי ואברכם: 10 ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם אליו וישקק להם ויחבק להם: 11 ויאמר ישראל אל־יוסף ראה<sup>148</sup> פניך לא פללתי והנה הראה אתי אלהים גם את־זרעך: 12 ויוצא יוסף אתם צעם ברכיו וישתחו<sup>149</sup> לאפיו<sup>150</sup> ארצה: 13 ויקח יוסף את־שניהם את־אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל ואת־מנשה בשמאל מימין ישראל ויגש אליו: 14 וישלח ישראל את־<sup>151</sup>ימינו וישת על־ראש אפרים והוא הצעיר ואת־שמאלו על־ראש מנשה שכל<sup>152</sup> את־ידיו כי מנשה הבכור: 15 ויברך את־יוסף<sup>153</sup> ויאמר

האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק  
האלהים הרעה אתי מעודי עד־היום הזה:

<sup>146</sup> Sam. has אפרתה, like four words earlier in the sentence, Gen 35.16, and MT of Gen 35.19 (cf. also Mic 5.1; Ps 132.6; Ru 4.11). However, some Hebrew manuscripts, Syr., and *Tg. Ps.-J.* support reading אפרת in 35.19, which is the more precise parallel phrase to 48.7b (בדרך ארפת). Taking just the evidence in Genesis, perhaps the final ה in לבא אפרתה (as in 35.16 and 48.7a) is a ה locale ('going to Ephrath'), while the best reading of 35.19 and 48.7b is בדרך אפרת with 'Ephrath' in the construct state ('on the road of/to/near Ephrath'). According to the *BHS* critical apparatus, this is the reading in a few Hebrew manuscripts. MT is inconsistent here.

<sup>147</sup> Sam. and Gr. have לך after מי אלה. The *BHS* critical apparatus also notes *Tg. Ps.-J.* for comparison. This could either be an original reading or it could be editorial smoothing (cf. Gen 33.5).

<sup>148</sup> The *BHS* critical apparatus suggests correcting ראות to ראה, since as a rule the infinitive construct ends in ות. The context dictates an infinitive construct, but MT may simply preserve a variant or idiosyncratic form of it. Joüon §79 p (n. 2) notes a similar form of the infinitive construct in II Kgs 13.17, 19; Ezr 9.14; II Chr 24.10; 31.1. GKC §75 n notes many other examples, both of גלה and גלו forms. Delitzsch (p. 507) and Westermann (III, 202) also cite Gen 31.28 and 50.20. Both Blau and Joüon §79 l also note a tendency for III-ה forms and III-א to converge, and it is noteworthy that ראה follows the more standard pattern for III-א infinitive construct forms. Joshua Blau, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*, LSAWS 2, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), pp. 248-52. On the word order as emphatic, see Takamitsu Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>149</sup> Sam., Gr., Syr., and Western Tgs. read וישתחו (pl. 'they bowed') for וישתחו (sg.). Both are grammatically acceptable. Based on the context, I would lean toward the MT's reading, because Joseph is the main active one here, and his bowing is more significant to the overall story. Ephraim and Manasseh bowing is appropriate but insignificant beyond itself. If the plural is taken to mean Joseph and his sons, then the narrative significance suggested below (sec. 3.2.4.2) remains possible.

<sup>150</sup> The *BHS* critical apparatus suggests correcting לאפיו to לו אפים based on Gr., Syr., and Gen 42.6. The latter reading is certainly a bit more transparent, but Wenham (II, 457) points out that the same or a similar construction as appears here in the MT also appears in Num 22.31; I Sam 20.41; and II Sam 18.28. See also Carl Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1956), §107 a.

<sup>151</sup> Sam. adds יד (cf. v. 17). However, MT is grammatically correct, and the parallel phrase ואת־שמאלו just a few words later also lacks יד.

<sup>152</sup> I follow the greater weight of opinion in understanding this as a hapax legomenon Piel of שכל II. So BDB, *HALOT*, Gr., Syr., Vulg. Nevertheless, a wordplay with שכל I, 'to be shrewd', as suggested by Rashi (p. 241) seems obvious.

<sup>153</sup> On the appropriateness of MT's יוסף over against the Gr. 's αὐτούς, see section 3.3 below.

16 המלאך<sup>154</sup> הגאל אתי מכל־רע יברך את־הנערים  
ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק  
וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ:

17 וירא יוסף כי־ישית אביו יד־ימינו על־ראש אפרים וירע בעיניו ויתמך יד־אביו להסיר אתה  
מעל ראש־אפרים על־ראש מנשה: 18 ויאמר יוסף אל־אביו לא־כן אבי כי־זה הבכר שים יצימך  
על־ראשו: 19 וימאן אביו ויאמר ידעתי בני ידעתי גס־הוא יהי־לעם יגס־הוא יגדל ואולם אחיו  
הקטן יגדל ממנו ויזרעו יהיה מלא־הגוים: 20 ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמור

בד<sup>155</sup> יברך<sup>156</sup> ישראל לאמר  
ישמך אלהים כאפרים וכמנשה

יושם את־אפרים לפני מנשה: 21 ויאמר ישראל אל־יוסף הנה אנכי מת והיה אלהים עמכם והשיב  
אתכם אל־ארץ אבותיכם: 22 ואני נתתי לך שכם אחד<sup>157</sup> על־אחיך אשר לקחתי מיד האמרי  
בהרבי ובקשתי:

1 After these things it was said to Joseph, ‘Behold, your father is ill.’ So he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And it was announced to Jacob and said, ‘Behold, your son Joseph has come to you.’ So Israel strengthened himself and sat up upon his bed.

3 Jacob said to Joseph, ‘El Shaddai appeared to me in Luz, in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me. 4 He said to me, “Behold, I am making you fruitful and multiplying you, and I will make you into a group of peoples, and I will give this land to your seed after you as an eternal possession.” 5 So now your two sons which were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, they are my own: Ephraim and Manasseh will be to me as Reuben and Simeon. 6 Your children which you fathered after them are yours. They shall be accounted under the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel died to my sorrow in the land of Canaan, on the road along the way, with some distance of land to go to Ephrath. I buried her there, on the road to Ephrath’ (which is Bethlehem). 8 Israel saw the sons of Joseph and said, ‘Who are these?’ 9 Joseph said to his father, ‘They are my sons whom God has given me in this place.’ He [Israel] said, ‘Bring them to me that I may bless them.’ 10 The eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not [hardly] see. He [Joseph] brought them to him, and he [Israel] kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, ‘I had not expected to see even your face, but look: God has let me see your children, as well.’ 12 Joseph led them away from his [Israel’s] knees, and he [Joseph] bowed himself with his face to the ground.

<sup>154</sup> Sam. has המלך, instead. The greater weight of evidence, and the more difficult reading, are with the MT.

<sup>155</sup> Gr. has plural ὅμῳ. The number matches better, but number disagreement is not unusual in Hebrew. The meaning is unaffected.

<sup>156</sup> The BHS critical apparatus’ suggestion of יִתְבָּרַךְ as an emendation has merit (loss of the ת through copyist’s error while preserving the vowels). Cf. Gen 22.18 and 26.4. The Piel, as MT has, is generally transitive, but no object is expressed in Gen 48.20. Either the passive Niphal (as in Gen 12.3; 18.18; 28.14) or the reflexive Hithpael are grammatically better suited for v. 20 than the Piel.

<sup>157</sup> Some manuscripts. of the Sam. correct the grammatical form to אחת. This assumes, of course, that the intended meaning is ‘one shoulder’, which is far from certain.



**13** Then Joseph took the two, Ephraim in his right hand opposite the left hand of Israel and Manasseh in his left hand opposite the right hand of Israel, and he brought them near to him. **14** But Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand he placed on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. **15** Then he blessed Joseph and said:

The God before whom my fathers walked, Abraham and Isaac,  
The God who has shepherded me my whole life until this day,

**16** The angel who has delivered me from all evil, may he bless the lads.  
And may they be called by<sup>158</sup> my name and by the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the land.

**17** Now Joseph had seen that his father was about to put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and it was not pleasing in his eyes. He grasped the hand of his father in order to move it from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. **18** Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head.’ **19** But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son. I know. He too will be a people, and he too will grow. However, his little brother will grow more than he will, and his seed will be a multitude of nations. **20** So he blessed them that day, saying:

By you will Israel bless itself, saying  
‘May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.’

So he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

**21** And Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and return you to the land of your fathers. **22** I give to you *Shekem* *’Ahad*<sup>159</sup> over your brothers, which I have taken from the hand of the Amorites by my sword and my bow.’

The blessing of the Joseph tribes in Genesis 48 is the second of the four Episodes that make up the larger Jacob death-bed story. It is itself a complex subunit with three distinct sections (verses 1–12, 13–20, and 21–22), but it is unified by its overall concern with the inheritance of Joseph.<sup>160</sup> This chapter will identify the conventional elements and structure of Genesis 48. Awareness of these conventions offers plausible synchronic solutions to certain commonly observed exegetical problems that have largely been explained by recourse to diachronic analysis.

---

<sup>158</sup> Lit. ‘May my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac be called among them.’

<sup>159</sup> The translation of שכם אחד is a known problem, but it is not important for this thesis. Therefore I have chosen to leave it untranslated.

<sup>160</sup> While 48.1-22 has usually been treated as a highly composite text with only problematic synchronic unity, more recently scholars have expressed appreciation for its literary unity. Wenham, II, 461-62; Cotter (pp. 323–25) treats 47.28-48.22 as a unit (Blessings: Joseph) parallel to the unit 49.1-28 (Blessings: All the Brothers); Arnold, pp. 374-77; Janzen, pp. 184-85; Matthews (II, 870) argues for the original unity of the chapter but also sees three literary sub-units within (1-12, 13-20, 21-22).

Unlike the other three Episodes' structures, which more easily divide up into Preparation, Testament, and Denouement sections, the conventional structure of a death-bed Episode may not be obvious in Genesis 48 at first glance. The Preparation, the narration that sets the stage for the Testament, is found in verses 1–2. Jacob/Israel begins speaking in verses 3–7, announcing his plans and rationale. This is clearly Testament material. The problem is what to do with the rest of chapter 48, since verses 8–22 contain a mixture of dialogue and narration, and the narration is often analysable as either Preparation or Denouement material.

The answer, in my opinion, is that Genesis 48 is best understood as a complex Episode consisting of three closely related sub-Episodes. For a single Episode to contain more than one iteration of the Preparation/Testament/Denouement pattern, especially in longer Episodes, is not unique to Genesis 48 (as a general rule, the longer the Episode, the more complex its structure). Genesis 27.1–40 is actually a combination of three or four separate Testament or Testament-like segments (Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob, Isaac and Jacob, Isaac and Esau). Joshua 23.14 begins a new sub-Testament without summoning a new audience and within the same temporal-spatial setting. Deuteronomy 31–34, which is Moses' conventional death-bed story, is made up of three Episodes/sets of last speeches/instructions (Deut 31.1–13; 31.14–32.47; 32.48–33.29), with Deuteronomy 34 being the Epilogue. The first two of these Episodes is each a series of addresses to Joshua, the Israelites or their leaders, and the Levites/Priests (in different orders).

The question, then, is why treat complex Episodes as single Episodes, especially when that complexity looks like multiple smaller Episodes (as in Genesis 48). This reason is self-consciously subjective: in my reading, the preponderance of indicators (including addressee, theme, constance or change in narrative tempo, constance or change in setting, the re-occurrence of Preparatory motifs or early

Testament motifs), no one of which is definitive, points to continuity more than discontinuity. Clearly, this is a point where differences of opinion are likely.

This being said, I read Genesis 48 as a single Episode containing three closely-related iterations of the pattern. Verses 1–2 are Preparatory not only for the first segment but for the entire Episode. Verses 3–12 are the first Testament/Denouement, verses 13–20 are the second, and verses 21–22 are the third. All three of these sub-Testaments are concerned with blessing Joseph and selecting him as Jacob's preeminent Worthy Successor, albeit in subtly different ways.

### 3.1 THE PREPARATION (GENESIS 48.1–2)

1 ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך חלה ויקח את־שני בניו עמו את־מנשה ואת־אפרים: 2 ויגד ליעקב ויאמר הנה בנך יוסף בא אליך ויתחזק ישראל וישב על־המטה:

1 After these things it was said to Joseph, 'Behold, your father is ill.' So he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And it was announced to Jacob and said, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you.' So Israel strengthened himself and sat up upon his bed.

A shift in tempo separates this Episode from the preceding one. The first four words signal an ellipsis of an indefinite amount of time, though in light of the summary of the final seventeen years of Jacob's life in Genesis 47.28 the final form places these two events likely within months of each other if not weeks. The first verse skims over the time required for Joseph to gather his sons and come to Jacob. The second verse normalizes back into scene tempo.

This ellipsis is often felt to be more significant structurally than other such ellipses, so that, for some, Jacob's death-bed story as a unit only begins at 48.1.<sup>161</sup>

Others view this as evidence of a rather unpolished stitching-together of parallel

---

<sup>161</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 358-69; Wenham, II, 459; Arnold, pp. 372-74. Both Waltke (pp. 591-95) and Matthews (II, 869) perceive the overall chiasmic organization of 47.28/29-49.33, but they also structure their commentaries in such a way that communicates a stronger division between 47.31 and 48.1 than between 47.27 and 47.28. This appears to be based on the strength of the ellipsis.

death-bed traditions.<sup>162</sup> But on the contrary: (1) death-bed stories routinely consist of more than one Episode, each with its own concern or audience; (2) it is not unprecedented for a significant or undefined amount of time to pass between Episodes, or between an Episode's beginning and its conclusion.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the span of the summary of Genesis 47.27 is seventeen years, whereas the span of this ellipsis is at most a few weeks or months. Therefore, while the ellipsis is a valid structural criterion, it should not be over-emphasized. Story-telling conventions and content tie Genesis 47.28–31 together with what follows into a single coherent plot structure much more strongly than it separates them. The significance of the ellipsis is simply that it demarcates the boundary between two subunits of the overall death-bed story.

The phrase **ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה** (along with slight variations) is a common transition from one story or section of a story to another. Just like a conjunction, a conjunctive clause varies in its strength and nuance. Some phrases (and even different instances of the same phrase) are stronger, and some are weaker; some imply more conjunction and others more disjunction. The phrase **אחר הדבר** **האלה** **הזה**, **ויהי**, occurs fourteen times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>164</sup> In each case, the fundamental illocutionary force of the phrase is to pass over an indefinite amount of time. However, even though it is used at the beginning of sections whose relation to what precedes is minimally important (we might call it a strong transition or a subject disjunction), it is also used in places where the unit it introduces is very much connected to the previous unit (a weak transition or subject

---

<sup>162</sup> Westermann, III, 206; Coats, Genesis, pp. 304–5.

<sup>163</sup> See chapter 2, section 2.1 (n. 87).

<sup>164</sup> Introductions/transitions that include the word **דבר** include Gen 15.1; 22.1, 20; 39.7; 40.1; 48.1; Josh 24.29; I Kgs 13.33; 17.17; 21.1; Ezra 7.1; Esth 2.1; 3.1; II Chr 32.1.

conjunction).<sup>165</sup> While it cannot be used alone to argue positively for a close plot connection with 47.28–31, neither does it argue against such a connection, since it does function in many places as a subject conjunction.

In the initial action of this scene, an anonymous messenger notifies Joseph that אֲבִיךָ חָלָה. The verb חָלָה signifies a number of different conditions, all of which are unified under the idea of being weak. It is used of sickness and injury, especially when that sickness or injury is serious enough to endanger life.<sup>166</sup> The context of this scene at the end of Jacob’s life (established in the preceding Episode) and the phrase’s occurrence in the exposition of the scene infuses it with significance so that אֲבִיךָ חָלָה becomes tantamount to אֲבִיךָ מָת. It is one of the standard variations of an

---

<sup>165</sup> This phrase as a strong transition or subject disjunction is found in Gen 15.1; 22.1; 40.1; 1 Kgs 21.1; Ezra 7.1; Esth 3.1; II Chr 32.1. As a weak transition or subject conjunction it is found in Gen 22.20; 39.7; 48.1; Josh 24.29; 1 Kgs 13.33; 17.17; Esth 2.1. This is a 50/50 split, and there are no noticeable trends among the different books of the Hebrew Bible. As one example of those scholars who do not take note of this ambiguity, Wenham (II, 463) asserts that “‘After these things’ marks a significant new stage in the story’, assuming the phrase to be universally disjunctive. But he cites Gen 39.7 as an example, which is clearly a weak transition or subject conjunction. See also Blum, p. 250; George W. Coats, ‘Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50’, *JBL*, 93 (1974), 15–21 (p. 18). Westermann (III, 206) conversely emphasizes the subject conjunctivity: ‘Die Wendung V.1 “Und es geschah nach diesen Ereignissen” [...] hat die Funktion, ein Einzelereignis einem größeren Zusammenhang einzufügen’.

<sup>166</sup> Abijah (1 Kgs 14); Ahaziah (II Kgs 1); Elisha (II Kgs 13.14—a conventional death-bed story); Hezekiah (II Kgs 20//Isa 38//II Chr 32); the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17.17); Benhadad (II Kgs 8.7); perhaps Asa (II Chr 16.12, which is immediately followed by his death report; the connection of Asa’s death with his disease (חָלָה) in his feet is less pronounced in 1 Kgs 15.23).

approaching death motif.<sup>167</sup> Among extant examples of the sickness motif, this one is unique for coming in the voice of an unnamed character.<sup>168</sup>

Rather than waiting for a summons, Joseph initiates the meeting, bringing along his two sons. This is consistent with stories following the pattern of the Selection of the Worthy Successor theme. This action shows Joseph with two of the characteristics of the Worthy Successor/Agent. First, he comes into possession of exclusive knowledge concerning the dying character via an anonymous messenger (perhaps anonymous specifically to de-emphasise the minor character and emphasise Joseph as the only named possessor of this knowledge).<sup>169</sup> The content of the privileged knowledge varies from story to story, but there is always some kind of unspoken connection made between the Worthy Successor or Agent character and the dying character through that privileged knowledge. Here, the knowledge is rendered

---

<sup>167</sup> For sickness (including disease, weakness, and poor vision) as a conventional and explicitly stated element of death-bed stories, see Gen 27.1; 48.10; Deut 31.2 (contrasting with 34.7); I Kgs 1; II Kgs 13; 20; Tob 4; *T. Reu.* 1.3; *T. Sim.* 1.2. Weakness or sickness is likely implied in Gen 24. While precise repetition of vocabulary is not vitally important in identifying common conventional plot structures, one may note that both stories in II Kgs use the verb חלה in their approaching death motifs. Coats (p. 304) disagrees that the sickness motif here implies the imminence of death and, contrasting this fact with the clear imminence of death in 47.29, sees this as evidence that 48.1-12 was inserted into a previously existing death report. Coats' argument, though, seems to be based on an over-interpretation of 'imminence of death'. Just because Jacob did not die at the end of the previous Episode does not mean that death was and is not imminent, and the sickness motif only brings the nearness of death even closer.

<sup>168</sup> Other approaching death motifs frequently show up in a character's speech (as opposed to the narrator's voice). Most commonly in the voice of the dying character himself (Gen 27.2, 4; 48.21; 49.29; 50.24; Deut 31.2, 29; Josh 23.2, 14; I Kgs 2.2; II Kgs 2.9; Tob 4.2-3; *T. Reu.* 1.4-5; *T. Dan* 2.1; *T. Naph.* 1.4). Less commonly in the voice of Yahweh (Deut 31.14, 16; 32.50; Josh 13.1) or of another human character (Gen 27.7 - Rebekah reporting Isaac's speech; II Kgs 20.1—Isaiah reporting Yahweh's speech).

<sup>169</sup> Jacob, as Worthy Successor, acquires his hidden knowledge via messenger (Rebekah) also in Gen 27.5-10. Another implementation of the messenger motif is found in I Kgs 11. The knowledge learned from the messenger pertains to the actions of the Unworthy Competitor. Bathsheba learns of Adonijah's actions from Nathan, and Nathan learns through some channel not described. Bathsheba already knows of David's plans for Solomon before the story begins. Yet another is found in II Kgs 2.3 and 5, where בני הנבאים twice tell Elisha about Elijah's coming assumption but Elisha already knows.

exclusive by omission: the other eleven brothers are not similarly notified within the story.

Second, the Worthy Successor is distinguished as such by an appropriate mix of initiative and obedience. Joseph acts upon the knowledge of his father's approaching death by initiating a meeting and entering into the thematized space of isolated nearness (as contrasted with the other eleven brothers). The purpose of the meeting is indicated by his inclusion of his own two sons. This is to be a blessing-bestowal meeting.<sup>170</sup> Joseph, who has been distinguished as the Worthy Successor since Genesis 37.2,<sup>171</sup> now actually assumes the role of the Agent acting on behalf of his sons the same way Bathsheba acts on behalf of Solomon and, as we shall see, Rebekah acts on behalf of Jacob. It is through the blessing and adoption of his two sons that Joseph is given the Worthy-Successor-as-birthright-recipient's double-portion.<sup>172</sup>

When Joseph's arrival is announced to Jacob, he strengthens himself and sits up. Why would Jacob sit up? To put the question differently (and avoid unwarranted psychologizing), why is this detail mentioned by the narrator rather than just having the dialogue begin? Rashi (p. 238) considers it a sign of respect for Joseph's exalted office. Benno Jacob suggests that Jacob is trying to hide his illness.<sup>173</sup> Many, if not most, commentators simply pass it over, presumably taking it as a simple description

---

<sup>170</sup> That Jacob would bless/adopt his two sons is clearly Joseph's intention from the beginning. Contra Sternberg, pp. 351-52, and de Hoop, p. 338.

<sup>171</sup> The designation of a Worthy Successor prior to the formalisation of his Selection in a death-bed Episode is typical. Isaac was designated (Gen 17) before he was formally selected (25.1-6), as was Jacob (designated in Gen 25.19-34 and 26.3-35; selected in Gen 27), Joshua (designated in Exod 24.13, Num 11.28; selected in Deut 31.7, 14, 23) and Solomon (designated in II Sam 12.25; selected in I Kgs 1). The designation of the Worthy Successor in preceding narrative tends to centre around divine favour as the primary qualification, and divine favour on Joseph is thematic in Gen 37-50.

<sup>172</sup> A Worthy Successor is not always a birthright or double-portion recipient (Joshua in Moses' death-bed story, for example; none of Mattathias' sons are designated as a double-portion recipient, though Simeon and Judas are singled out as leaders), but up to this point, Genesis has consistently blended the two categories. The double portion also plays a part in the death-bed story of Elijah (II Kgs 2.9).

of physical action (Jacob is pulling himself together). But Hebrew narrative is generally pretty trim when it comes to describing movements upon the stage.<sup>174</sup> For example, in the previous Episode (47.28–31), the narrator never speaks of Jacob sitting up, but in verse 31 suddenly he's 'bowing down' at the head of his bed. However we reconstruct the image here, we are never told anything about Jacob's posture until it becomes relevant (even that he is on a bed). This detail in 48.2 is not simply a throwaway remark.

The best explanation for this detail involves the conventional features of death-bed stories and of the ideal of the noble death. Specifically, Jacob's sitting up reveals a kind of wilful vigour, intentionality, and initiative. Joseph's initiation of the meeting is met not with passivity in Jacob. The strengthening/sitting up motif is one of the bed-related motifs mentioned in section 2.3, and it also occurs in *Testament of Reuben* 1.4–5 and *Testament of Simeon* 1.2. A less obvious but in some ways more apt comparison can be made to I Kings 1.28–35, the turning point in the story where David suddenly ceases being passive and begins issuing commands. With regard to the structure of the death-bed type-scene, Genesis 48.2 and I Kings 1.28 occur at precisely the same point, that is, after the Agent has approached the dying character and just before the dying character gives his Testament. It is also possible that the purpose of the stew in Genesis 27 (another Selection of the Worthy Successor story) is to strengthen Isaac to enable him to exert some initiative of his own and give the blessing.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, trans. by Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob, aug. edn (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2007), p. 321.

<sup>174</sup> See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 102–103: 'There are virtually no "free motifs" in biblical narrative.'

<sup>175</sup> Von Rad, pp. 276–77; Westermann, II, 439; III, 183; Wenham, II, 463; Matthews, II, 873; Waltke, p. 595. Verses 6 (ואברכבה—Qal 1st sg volitive), and 4 and 19 (ואכלה בעבור תברכך/ני נפשי-/ד) can be, but do not have to be, interpreted causatively. However, note the way the significance of this motif is cleverly reversed in Isaac's case (taking the more common significance—initiative—as the more standard one). It shows him to be at least partially dependent for his strength, and therefore for the



This show of counter-initiative on the part of the dying character reflects the ideal of the good death,<sup>176</sup> since awareness, mental clarity, and physical vigour are commonly features of an ideal death in many different cultures, observably in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>177</sup> The Preparation on both sides certainly designates what follows as important for both Jacob and Joseph.<sup>178</sup>

### 3.1.1 ‘JACOB’ AND ‘ISRAEL’

As noted in the previous chapter, the variation in Jacob’s name from one sentence to another, as in 47.28–29, has been one of the key features used to divide Jacob’s death-bed story into its pre-Genesis units. Here, as in Genesis 46.2, the names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ occur in close proximity within the same sentence, forcing those using such criteria source-critically to divide the smallest of sense units in a way that

---

proper execution of his death-bed proceedings, on external forces. Isaac does show initiative in arranging the meeting, but he defers a portion of that initiative until the recipient can strengthen him. This is not to say that Isaac dies a poor death. It simply shows how motifs and their significances can be creatively deployed and reshaped in each new circumstance.

<sup>176</sup> The ‘good death’ here and throughout this thesis refers primarily to what in Greek literature was called *kalōs thanein*, or dying nobly, versus *eu thanein*, or dying well. The latter pertains to medical concerns and palliative care, whereas the former is sociological (especially apparent in the stylized world of storytelling). The two categories are not completely separable, but the distinction is useful. See Allan Kellehear, ‘Good Death’, *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 209–10. In many ways, the features that characterize a good life are those that characterize a good death, simply transposed to the specific features of death as a unique and final life event. For discussion of the features of good and bad life and death in the Hebrew Bible, see Bailey, pp. 47–52; Roger Norman Whybray, *The Good Life in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), esp. pp. 5–6, 15–18, 289–90; Neumann-Gorsolke, pp. 111–36; Leuenberger, pp. 151–76. On views of death in the ancient world more generally, see ‘Death’, *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, 20 vol. (Leiden: Brill, 2002–2010), IV (2004), 129–33.

<sup>177</sup> That these things are aspects of the ideal death can be seen in the way they occur as motifs in various other death-bed stories, in particular Deut 34.7 (see George W. Coats, ‘Legendary Motifs in the Moses Death Reports’, *CBQ*, 39, no. 1 (1977), 33–44). Blindness and physical weakness are, however, unavoidable aspects of death in general and are not in themselves shameful (Matthews, II, 427). They actually serve to highlight the effort the character makes despite his weakness/sickness. Hence the importance of Jacob sitting up, Isaac eating, and David giving orders. For mental and physical vigour as features of the good death in more general human history, see Gittings, pp. 210–11.

<sup>178</sup> Westermann, III, 206; Matthews, II, 873.

is suspicious and unsatisfactory.<sup>179</sup> Diachronic explanations for the variation in Jacob's name are almost as old as source-distinction based on the divine names 'Yahweh' and 'Elohim', but no true consensus has ever emerged as it has periodically in relation to the divine names.<sup>180</sup>

Nevertheless, the variations are intriguing. Especially in sentences like this one, where the two names are close together, they cry out for some kind of explanation, and there has been no shortage of synchronic attempts. Aesthetic variation<sup>181</sup> is an obvious suggestion, but what does this mean? Any synchronic explanation is likely some kind of motivated aesthetic variation. A better description of what is generally meant by this term would be intuitive aesthetic variation, meaning essentially that the author uses what name sounds or feels best to the author at the time. It may be possible to discern poetic principles to explain the apparent

---

<sup>179</sup> Dillmann, p. 427; Gunkel, pp. 423-29; Procksch, pp. 267-70, 420-26, 559-64. While Speiser (*Genesis*, pp. 354-57) does not divide the verse source-critically, he does see the presence of 'Israel' as a result of the joining of J and E and omits it from his own translation. Attempts such as this to avoid the issue by attributing it to a mid-level stage of development, like the JE redaction, simply camouflages the problem without solving it. It still supposes that the composition of the present text involves someone at some point joining two parts of two different sentences without reconciling the styles of those two sentences.

<sup>180</sup> Explanations built around the Documentary Hypothesis seem to have reached their most consistent expression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in Dillmann (Driver, coming a bit later, is also pretty consistent in his application of this principle). According to Green, 'Wellhausen, Kautzsch and other critics abandon the attempt as hopeless.' W. Henry Green, 'The Pentateuchal Question. III. Gen. 37:2-Ex. 12:51', *Hebraica*, 7 (1890), 1-38 (p. 22). Tradition-criticism has never come close to a consensus, though some important works on the Joseph-story attempted to connect one name primarily with a Reuben-tradition and the other with a Judah tradition. See Redford, p. 179; Schmitt, pp. 117-21; Vergote, p. 394. De Hoop's work on Jacob's death-bed story concludes that 'Israel' is more characteristic of the older 'pro-Joseph' layer of the Joseph story, and 'Jacob' or pairings of the two names is more characteristics of the later 'pro-Judah' layer (pp. 569-74). He does not deal with chs. 37-46, however, except in a few isolated instances. The assessment of Donner (*Gestalt*, p. 39), however, is correct, 'Sicher ist nur soviel, daß der Wechsel als ein ernstzunehmendes Quellenscheidungsargument nicht in Betracht kommt.'

<sup>181</sup> Aesthetic variation is suggested by, among others, M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship, and Other Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), p. 17. Longacre's conclusion is similar to mine: 'I believe that a careful sympathetic reading of the story makes it highly plausible that a skilful narrator has been at work and his use of Israel/Jacob is neither random nor unmotivated.' Longacre, *Joseph*, p. 151.

randomness, but these might be extremely complex and not consistently followed. Intuitive aesthetic variation would result, therefore, either in a more random distribution, producing greater evenness overall, or else in something more easily discernible, like poetic pairs (see, for example, Genesis 49.2, 7, and 24). Instead what we find is an uneven clumping of the name ‘Israel’ in certain places, with the name ‘Jacob’ remaining the preferred personal name in all kinds of texts.<sup>182</sup> This suggests a narratological or rhetorical motivation behind the distribution of the names, and one which is not limited merely to chapters 37–50. There are indications that at least some of the variation can only be explained as a part of the final form of Genesis as a whole. Moreover, a purely synchronic explanation should take into consideration chapters 32–35, to which there are numerous literary ties in the Joseph story, especially in Jacob’s death-bed story.<sup>183</sup>

Prior to Genesis 37 the name ‘Israel’ occurs in the two naming scenes (32.28 and 35.10), in the name of the altar אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Genesis 33.20), in the story of

---

<sup>182</sup> Redford, p. 132. This same argument applies to the names ‘Yahweh’ and ‘Elohim’ in Genesis. If there is a synchronic explanation, simple aesthetic variation is not it. In that case, however, a basically plausible diachronic theory offers at least a competitive explanation (although the arguments of Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch: Eight Lectures*, trans. by Israel Abrahams, 1st English edn (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961; Heb. 1941), pp. 27–41, are not to be dismissed; see Blum, pp. 471–75, for an excellent discussion of the problems and potential uses of divine names in diachronic research). This is not the case with the names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’. On the other hand are the names ‘Abram’ and ‘Abraham’ (and ‘Sarai’ and ‘Sarah’), which change universally, regardless of source, after ch. 17 (even though the renaming only occurs in one of the sources). This can only be explained synchronically. It shows that whoever was responsible for the final form of Genesis was not negligent of details like names, and that they did have a transformative compositional impact upon their source material. Therefore, it is likely that some kind of synchronic explanation lies behind the variation in Jacob’s name. Green, 1–38 (p. 22).

<sup>183</sup> Schmitt (pp. 117–21) argues against any relationship between the Yahwist tradition of Genesis and the Judah tradition of the Joseph story based on the common occurrence of the name ‘Israel’. I agree with Schmitt that one common feature is no foundation for a common diachronic derivation, just as different names for the same character are unreliable indicators of different sources or traditions or redactions. My point here is (1) that the rationale for the name variation in *Toledot Jacob* is additionally confirmed if that same rationale is present in *Toledot Isaac*, and (2) it is reasonable to suppose that the same rationale could underlie both segments, since the two segments are tied together artistically in numerous other ways.

Reuben's sexual encounter with Bilhah in 35.21–22, and in the story of the rape of Dinah in 34.7.<sup>184</sup> The latter two instances, especially, bear investigating.

In the midst of an overwhelming tendency in the narrative to refer to Jacob as 'Jacob' prior to chapter 37, the name 'Israel' suddenly appears twice in Genesis 35.21–22a when Israel moves on and encamps beyond Migdal Eder and when he hears about Reuben's lying with Bilhah. This short notice is the foundation for Genesis 49.4 where Reuben is criticised and implicitly rejected as birthright recipient. While scholars have expressed uncertainty about the originality of the connection between 35.21–22 and 49.4, the two texts are clearly intended to be connected in the final form.<sup>185</sup> In light of this connection, the best explanation for the significance of the name 'Israel' as a personal name in 35.21–22 is that Reuben's sin is being depicted as having a national scope and inheritance-related repercussions.<sup>186</sup>

The other use of 'Israel', which could be either corporate or personal, is found in 34.7 in the phrase *בִּי־נִבְלָה עָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּתִּי־עֵקֶב*. The context is the rape of Dinah and the anger of Simeon and Levi over it. Whether one goes with the majority opinion that 'Israel' here is an anachronistic way of referring to the whole clan of Jacob and his family,<sup>187</sup> or whether one opts for the minority view that 'Israel' is being used as a personal name for Jacob,<sup>188</sup> the presence of the name 'Israel' is striking, providing a national scope for the events surrounding its presence. Like the

---

<sup>184</sup> 'Israel' also occurs in 32.32, which is an aetiological note where 'Israel' clearly refers to the later people group.

<sup>185</sup> Von Rad, p. 423; Westermann, III, 224–25.

<sup>186</sup> Matthews, II, 627. Alternatively, Israel could here refer to the entire family, since Israel as a corporate noun very often takes a singular verb. The reason for its appearance here, however, still has to do with its significance for inheritance and the designation of the birthright recipient.

<sup>187</sup> For example, Driver, p. 419; Hamilton, II, 357; Sarna, p. 234; von Rad, p. 332. In light of the occurrence of essentially the exact phrase in Deut 22.21, Judg 20.6 and 10, II Sam 13.12, and Jer 29.23, where the phrase describes sexual sin (along with false prophecy in Jer 29.23) perpetrated within the people group of Israel, the preponderance of evidence leans in favour of a corporate referent for the name in Gen 34.7.

<sup>188</sup> Suggested, if not asserted, by Wenham, II, 312 and Matthews, II, 599.

story of Reuben and Bilhah, this story is the justification for the rejection of Simeon and Levi, sons numbers two and three, as recipients of the birthright (49.5–7).<sup>189</sup> So from these two texts, 34.7 and 35.21–22a,<sup>190</sup> it appears that there is, at least sometimes, some rhetorical logic, if not consistency, behind the uses of ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’, the latter being especially pertinent when matters significant to the future of the nation (i.e. impacting upon inheritance) are in view.

This same distinction may possibly be reconciled with the occurrences in chapters 37–47. In *Toledot Jacob*, there is a general tendency for occurrences of the name ‘Israel’ to group in chapters 43, 45 and 46. Several of the instances of ‘Israel’ are corporate in nature, occurring within the term בני־ישראל,<sup>191</sup> but Jacob is individually called by the name ‘Israel’ in 37.3 and 13 (in his interactions with Joseph); 43.6, 8, and 11 (in his interactions with Judah); 45.28 (when Jacob expresses joy/relief over Joseph being alive); 46.1 and 2 (in the preparations for the migration to Egypt); 46.8 (in a genealogical note of those who went to Egypt); and in 46.29–30 (when Jacob reunites with Joseph). Several of these instances can be

---

<sup>189</sup> At least in the final form of Genesis. Noth (pp. 86–87) may be correct that the story originally celebrated the deed but has been utilized subsequently as a background event for 49.5–7, but I am not convinced. In any case, it is highly improbable that the story should be read as a celebration in the final form, so that Jacob’s silence implies the unmitigated righteousness of Simeon and Levi (as in Wenham, II, 316–17, 319; Hamilton, II, 372). This line of thought does have a long tradition in the history of interpretation. See Philo of Alexandria, ‘On the Migration of Abraham’, in *Philo*, trans. by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, LCL, 10 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1932), IV, 123–269 (§224); T. Levi. However, Rashi (p. 167) shows that the history of interpretation has not been monolithic in this regard.

<sup>190</sup> That these two stories are the intended to connect with Gen 49 may also be seen in the rather open-ended way both end. Gen 34 ends with dialogue, specifically a question asked by Simeon and Levi. Such an ending is not unique, but most story units end with a narrator comment. In this case, the tension remains unresolved. Has Jacob accepted their reasoning or not? Similarly, 35.22a says, ‘It happened while Israel dwelt in that land that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine, and Israel hard [of it].’ Clearly, this is a misdeed, but no repercussion follows, nor even any event closely related. See Wenham, II, 328; Hartley, pp. 296, 302–3; Waltke, p. 478; Arnold, p. 298. Matthews, II, 628–29, interprets the open-endedness of 35.22a as an implication that Jacob’s authority had dwindled. Understanding the gap rather as unfinished business requires the least reading into the text, but it also requires an appreciation for the final form transcending the typical tradition units.

<sup>191</sup> Gen 42.5; 45.21; 46.5; 46.8; 47.27.

reconciled with the rationale suggested for 34.7 and 35.21–22. The passages dealing with the special relationship between Jacob and Joseph (including 45.28) obviously bear upon inheritance issues. The migration to Egypt and the accompanying genealogy (46.1, 2, 8) is an epic moment of national significance, so the use of Israel as Jacob's name is appropriate. The most inexplicable usages are those in chapter 43, where the subject is the interaction of Jacob with his fourth son, Judah, who is technically next in line after the rejected Levi.

It was previously common to view 42.35–38 and 43.1–15 (or some other dissection of 42.35–43.1–15) as a doublet, the first one deriving from E (or the Reuben-tradition) and the other from J (or the Judah-tradition) thus explaining, supposedly, not only the use of 'Jacob' versus 'Israel' but also the focus on Reuben versus Judah.<sup>192</sup> Westermann, however, argues that these features are not able to support source-critical argumentation, especially in chapters 42 and 43.<sup>193</sup> He asserts that 42.35–38 and 43.1–15 are not a doublet, strictly speaking, because of the contrast between Jacob's rejection of Reuben's proposal versus Israel's acceptance of Judah.<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, when the name variation in Genesis 43 is interpreted rhetorically (meaning that this story is being designated by the narrator as a portentous moment regarding the future of the tribes), the results are a stark contrast with the earlier passages in 34 and 35.21–22. Unlike Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, Judah apparently does nothing wrong. Rather, his leadership is contrasted with the attempted but failed leadership of Reuben. Is this perhaps the background for the

---

<sup>192</sup> Gunkel, pp. 399-405; Procksch, pp. 247-53, 407-13; Von Rad, pp. 384-87; Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 318-30; Vawter, pp. 422-24; Ruppert, pp. 88, 100; Redford, pp. 184-85; Schmitt, pp. 43-52.

<sup>193</sup> Westermann, III, 118-22.

<sup>194</sup> The contrast in result means that the two accounts are not variants of a common story. Donner (*Gestalt*, pp. 36-39) sees duplication as a style characteristic of the Joseph story (some functioning to emphasize aspects of the story, others to delay the storyline) and expresses scepticism concerning the use of doublets as source-critical criteria.

exalted blessing Judah receives in 49.8–12?<sup>195</sup> If so, then all the uses of the name ‘Israel’ for Jacob in Genesis 32–46 fall into a category of events having official or national significance, especially those with inheritance-related repercussions.<sup>196</sup>

In light of this, then, in chapter 48, where the inheritance is beginning to be awarded and Manasseh and Ephraim are being received as a double portion for Joseph, the switch from ‘Jacob’ to ‘Israel’ makes perfect sense. When Jacob

---

<sup>195</sup> Von Rad (p. 387), for one, interprets Judah’s behaviour in ch. 43 as the passing of a test. See also Heinisch, pp. 17–18. Clearly, the double preference in *Toledot Jacob* both for Joseph and for Judah prefigures the two/three eponymous tribes emerging as the leading tribes from the time of the Exodus through to the time of the divided Monarchy (according to Israelite tradition recorded in the Hebrew Bible). The implied reader of Genesis assumes a great deal of knowledge of Israel’s subsequent history (the Patriarchal Promise is not completely fulfilled in Genesis, the anticipation of kings, etc.), and Genesis must then be read much as a modern prequel would be read, where the tension is not so much found in what happens but in how it happens. Instead of a blunt story exalting either Joseph or Judah, the story subtly describes the emergence of a dual leadership role. The narrator shows not only the virtue of Joseph and the reason for the later strength and number of the Joseph tribes, but also the emergence of maturity and leadership ability in the fourth son after the first three have been discredited. Judah does not receive the double portion, but he does receive the sceptre. There are ambiguities and multiple plot threads, but even if this narrative came together in a fashion like that suggested by Redford or de Hoop, this is not a result of editorial carelessness. It is a necessary feature of the story given its role as an aetiological prequel to the later history of the Israelite nation. See also B. J. van der Merwe, pp. 221–32 (pp. 229–30).

<sup>196</sup> This view is by no means new. See also Green, 1–38 (p. 22); Heinisch, Genesis, p. 17; Heinisch, ‘Der Wechsel der Namen Jakob und Israel in der Genesis’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Seelsorge*, 6 (1929), 115–129; E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1973), p. 132. Perhaps they are not even to be considered as precisely the same category of name. Donner (*Gestalt*, p. 39) for example, regards them as a common name (a ‘bürgerlicher Name’) and an honorary title (an ‘Ehrenname’). This might explain why God addresses Jacob as ‘Jacob’ in 46.2 right after the narrator says, ‘God spoke to Israel’. While God has renamed Jacob, he still addresses him by his given, and perhaps more personal, name. Longacre’s view (*Joseph*, pp. 149–51) is comparable, understanding references to ‘Jacob’ to emphasize Jacob as a suffering human being, while those to ‘Israel’ emphasize his ‘office and dignity.’ I can find no argument that specifically refutes this particular explanation. Admittedly, the use of the two names is not entirely consistent even in this respect. The appearance of ‘Israel’ in 50.2 does not fall easily into this category, whereas a source-critical explanation fits very well. The name ‘Jacob’ still appears in places where ‘Israel’ might be more appropriate according to this understanding of their respective significances. (In particular, see Gen 47.28, 48.2, 49.1, and 49.33, since these verses are taking place within the death-bed story.) But it is useful to view the two names from the perspective of marked and unmarked terms. ‘Jacob’ is the more common, or unmarked term, and so has a wider array of connotations, including those pertaining to national significance. ‘Israel’, on the other hand, is the marked term, so it is not only less common but more highly specialised in its appropriate applications. Compare also Gen 37.1–2a versus 37.3, for instance. Whatever the historical origin of the two names, their occurrences in the final form are not completely irregular or irrational. On the contrary, they betray compositional intentionality at this level, making the usefulness of this data for diachronic study questionable (or at least more complicated).

strengthens himself and sits up, he does so for an official purpose (to adopt officially and bless his grandsons) and in an official role (as ‘Israel’, the fountainhead of the embryonic nation).

Variation in name usage is not at all a conventional feature of death-bed stories, since this strange dual name status for Jacob is not itself typical. Rather, the use of either ‘Jacob’ or ‘Israel’ can be explained without dividing up Jacob’s death-bed story into pre-final form units. Also, the name variations demonstrate that the use of the name ‘Israel’ is connected with the official significance of the events surrounding its use, particularly with regard to inheritance issues, which are properly resolved in Hebrew narrative in a death-bed Testament. The switch from ‘Jacob’ to ‘Israel’ mid-sentence in 48.2 flags the story as containing official inheritance business, which helps firmly locate the concerns and rhetoric of this death-bed story within the typical range of purposes of other death-bed stories.

### 3.2 TESTAMENT A: THE ADOPTION (GENESIS 48.3–12)

3 ויאמר יעקב אל־יוסף אל שדי נראה־אלי בלזו בארץ כנען ויברך אתי: 4 ויאמר אלי הנני מפרך והרביתך ונתתיך לקהל עמים ונתתי את־הארץ הזאת לזרעך אחר־ך אחוזת עולם: 5 ועתה שני־בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים עד־באי אליך מצרימה ל־יהם אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו־לי: 6 ומולדתך אשר־הולדת אחריהם לך יהיו על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם: 7 ואני בבאי מפדן מתה עלי רחל בארץ כנען בדרך בעוד כברת־ארץ לבא אפרתה אקברה שם בדרך אפרת הוא בית לחם: 8 וירא ישראל את־בני יוסף ויאמר מי־אלה: 9 ויאמר יוסף אל־אביו בני הם אשר־נתן־לי אלהים בזה ויאמר קחם־נא אלי ואברכם: 10 ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם אליו וישקק להם ויחבק להם: 11 ויאמר ישראל אל־יוסף ראה פניך לא פללתי והנה הראה אתי אלהים גם את־זרעך: 12 ויוצא יוסף אתם צעם ברכיו וישתחו לאפיו ארצה:

3 Jacob said to Joseph, ‘El Shaddai appeared to me in Luz, in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me. 4 He said to me, “Behold, I am making you fruitful and multiplying you, and I will make you into a group of peoples, and I will give this land to your seed after you as an eternal possession.” 5 So now your two sons which were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, they are my own: Ephraim and Manasseh will be to me as Reuben and Simeon. 6 Your children which you fathered after them are yours. They shall be accounted under the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel died to my sorrow in the land of Canaan, on the road along the way, with some distance of land to go to Ephrath. I buried her there, on the road to Ephrath’ (which is



Bethlehem). **8** Israel saw the sons of Joseph and said, ‘Who are these?’ **9** Joseph said to his father, ‘They are my sons whom God has given me in this place.’ He [Israel] said, ‘Bring them to me that I may bless them.’ **10** The eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not [hardly] see. He [Joseph] brought them to him, and he [Israel] kissed them and embraced them. **11** And Israel said to Joseph, ‘I had not expected to see your face, but look: God has let me see even your children.’ **12** Joseph led them away from his [Israel’s] knees, and he [Joseph] bowed himself with his face to the ground.

The Preparation ends and Testament A begins when Jacob/Israel begins speaking.

The ensuing segment, verses 3–12, merits particularly close attention. While the subject of this section, in its final form, is not too difficult to summarize (the adoption by Jacob of Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim), the passage’s internal coherence has been seriously questioned by scholarship, not only with regard to the relationship between verses 3–7 (P) and verses 8–12 (JE or non-P), but even with regard to those sub-sections themselves. What do verses 3–7 have to do with anything around them? Does Jacob know his grandsons or not? Can he see them or not? What, in the end, does this segment accomplish? These questions find some compelling answers when verses 3–12 are compared with a number of other texts for conventional patterns and structures.

### 3.2.1 AN HISTORICAL PROLOGUE

It is not uncommon to find a review of historical events as a part of a death-bed story, especially near its beginning, establishing the rationale for the Testament.<sup>197</sup> This feature recalls other ceremonial events in the Hebrew Bible, namely covenant institution or renewal events, and these events, in turn, are commonly compared with other ancient Near Eastern legal forms, especially the suzerainty covenant (in all of

---

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Gen 24.7; 28.4 (referring to the land ‘which God gave to Abraham’); 49.4, 5-6, 29-32; Deut 31.4, 7 (the land that Yahweh swore to Israel; cf. 31.23; 34.4), 27; 32.51; Josh 23.2-4, 9; 24.2-13, 17-18; 1 Kgs 1.17, 30; 11 Kgs 20.3; 1 Macc 2.51-60; Tob 14.4. The *T. 12 Patr.* are full of apocryphal stories about the twelve sons of Jacob, many of which justify the ethical instructions contained therein. Predictions also play an important in the rationale of a Testament, being the future-oriented counterpart of the historical review’s past orientation. Sometimes these two elements are difficult to separate out from each other (Gen 28.3-4, as one example).

its manifestations). Comparison shows that 48.3–7 is coherent as such a conventional historical prologue.

Despite some cosmetic differences between covenant forms of different time periods and regions (i.e. between 2nd millennium Hittite treaties and 1st millennium Neo-Assyrian treaties), overall the covenant legal tradition of the ancient Near East is characterized more by its continuity and homogeneity.<sup>198</sup> Standard legal forms were adaptable to different times and people groups. Greatly generalising, suzerainty treaties contained identifying preambles, historical prologues, stipulations, lists of witnesses, and blessings and curses, though all groups of treaties—Hittite, Assyrian, and others—exhibit a good deal of flexibility. In treaties containing historical prologues, these prologues establish the basis or rationale for the relationship to be regulated by the following treaty.<sup>199</sup>

Aspects of this common form can be found in several biblical passages, most notably Exodus 19,<sup>200</sup> Joshua 24, I Samuel 12, and numerous places in the book of

---

<sup>198</sup> The literature is immense, but I have found especially helpful Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, AnBib, 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); id., *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973); Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, AnBib, 88 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982); George E. Mendenhall, 'Covenant', *ABD*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 1179–202; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, OTSt (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

<sup>199</sup> Mendenhall, 1179–202 (pp. 1180–3).

<sup>200</sup> Where this unit ends is unclear. Tentatively, I take it to be the end of Exodus itself. While Exod 19–40 may be divisible source-, form-, or tradition-critically, the present text is a coherent whole, a grand covenant-instituting text. Commentators are divided over whether or not a significant new section of Exodus begins with ch. 19, but those taking chs. 19–40 as a second or third major division include Martin Noth, *Exodus*, trans. by J. S. Bowden, OTL, 1st Eng. edn. (London: SCM Press, 1962); William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB, 2a (New York: Doubleday, 2006); J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971); and G. Henton Davies, *Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 1967). Propp (p. 33) sees chs. 19–40 as dealing with one overriding question, i.e. how can Israel exist in relationship with God? Even so, he subdivides this large segment into smaller segments, with ch. 19 being the introduction to the so-called Book of the Covenant (20.19–23.33). Others also connect ch. 19 primarily with chs. 20–23 or 24. See, e.g., Terence F. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991); Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009). In both cases, ch. 19

Deuteronomy.<sup>201</sup> The passages, like their ancient Near Eastern treaty counterparts, represent the ‘signing’ event as a ceremony that includes oaths and other verifying rituals. However, unlike Deuteronomy and the covenant section of Exodus, Joshua 24 and I Samuel 12 narrate only the covenant event rather than its substantial details (the stipulations, blessings, curses, etc.).<sup>202</sup> This shows that the covenant event as a narrated event is separable from the covenant document itself.

This covenant event is, furthermore, analysable in its own right as a conventional scene or plot.<sup>203</sup> A comparison of them reveals a broad common pattern:

---

is understood to be commencing a covenant-initiation ceremony.

<sup>201</sup> While there is some debate, especially regarding Deuteronomy, over the nature and extent of the biblical texts’ correspondence of form and content with ancient Near Eastern treaty forms, much of that debate is more concerned with the historical implications of the covenant form: does it correspond more closely to 2nd millennium BCE Hittite forms or to 1st millennium BCE Neo-Assyrian forms? (I am not here concerned with dating Deuteronomy, and I am not convinced, in any case, that such data can be reliably used for dating purposes.) Connected with this, as well, are assertions concerning the purpose of Deuteronomy, e.g. Deuteronomy’s supposed closer correspondence with Assyrian forms shows not only a late date but also an anti-Assyrian political-rhetorical rationale for the book’s composition. The classic expression of this point-of-view is probably Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). Others, like Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 24-28, still find the Hittite parallels significant, proposing that the book of Deuteronomy was used in a covenant renewal ceremony and, despite generations of reworking, has essentially Mosaic origins. Still again are others who question the existence, or at least the strength, of the treaty form in Deuteronomy as a whole. See T. A. Lenchak, *Choose Life!: A Rhetorical-critical Investigation of Deuteronomy 28,69-30,20*, AnBib (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), pp. 19-32, who identifies cultic, legal, and wisdom aspects in Deuteronomy but sees none of these as definitive. It appears to me that the standard contract forms and language of the ancient Near Eastern legal tradition are in the background, in smaller individual sections of Deuteronomy as much as, or even more than, in its overall composition.

<sup>202</sup> Josh 24.25-26 mentions the existence of stipulations and the writing of them in a book, but it does not enumerate them. Because of this omission, whatever its history Josh 24 is not really an ancient Near Eastern treaty text but a narrative text that has a legal form akin to the treaty in the background and that emulates a treaty institution ritual. As McCarthy (*Old Testament Covenant*, p. 20) notes in a slightly different but related context, ‘it is the statement of [the stipulations] ... which characterizes the treaty as a literary form.’

<sup>203</sup> The mobility of this form suggests a flexible legal form which could be applied to many different situations, much like modern attorneys modify standard contract forms rather than writing new contracts from scratch. This is more than merely a convenience—conventional language and forms lend an event legitimising significance by their very formality. Peter A. Winn, ‘Legal Ritual’, *Law and Critique*, 2 (1991), 207–32 (p. 217); Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 139-44.

(1) a historical prologue; (2) a confirming dialogue (often but not necessarily containing oaths); (3) a confirming event (different for each context).<sup>204</sup> This covenant event three times appears within a farewell speech of an important figure.<sup>205</sup> Scholarly recognition of this covenant-event form is usually limited to covenant assembly contexts,<sup>206</sup> but this same form can be detected in at least two death-bed stories pertaining to the Selection of the Worthy Successor: Genesis 48.1–12 and 1 Kings 1.15–48. Both contexts are concerned with the legal justification of the choice of Successor by a dying character, though the implementation of that form in narrative differs considerably. In Genesis 48, verses 3–7 function as a historical prologue, verses 8–9a as a confirming dialogue, and verses 9b–12 as a confirming event.<sup>207</sup>

### 3.2.2 GENESIS 48.3–7 AMONG THE PRIESTLY PROMISE TEXTS

The past event Jacob refers to is a theophanic encounter at Bethel. While there are two such encounters narrated earlier in Genesis (chapters 28 and 35), a comparison of the style and content of the two passages shows a much closer affinity with the

---

<sup>204</sup> According to this schema, Josh 24.2-13 is the historical prologue, 14-24 the confirming dialogue and 25-28 the confirming event (the giving and writing of the statutes and the setting up of the stone monument; Joshua's performative speech in v. 27 belongs here, as well). The form in 1 Sam 12 is not so regular as in Josh 24. Roughly, 12.6-15 are the historical prologue, 1-5 and 19-25 are a confirming dialogue, and 16-18 are the confirming event (thunder and rain on that day during the wheat harvest). As with other type-scenes, variation in order is normal. Exod 19 also has these elements: 19.3-6 is the historical prologue, 7-9 is the confirming dialogue, 10-25 is the confirming event (including, like 1 Sam 12, a description of the coming event).

<sup>205</sup> Deuteronomy and Josh 24 are in the context of conventional death-bed scenes, and 1 Sam 12 may turn out to be best understood as a part of a fragmented death-bed event for the character Samuel. McCarthy (*Treaty and Covenant*, p. 145) asks, 'Can it be an accident the same thing turns up at the passing of three great leaders of Israel?'

<sup>206</sup> Many other texts, like Ezra 10.9-44, bear some resemblance to these passages on account of the setting being a public assembly. My purpose here is not to exclude other passages from comparison, but rather to focus on those passages that bear the closest relation to Gen 48.

<sup>207</sup> 1 Kgs 1.15-48—(1) historical prologue = vv. 15-27; (2) confirming dialogue = vv. 28-31; (3) confirming event = vv. 32-48.

second, and this is consistent with the usual identification of 35.9–13, 15 and 48.3–7 as Priestly texts. Furthermore, both 35.9–15 and 48.3–4 are members of a group of *El-Šadday* promise texts that share in certain structural and phrasal elements. By addressing and testing the prevailing diachronic opinions, the art of the final composer and the organic quality of 48.3–7, both within itself and in relation to its present context, come to light.

### 3.2.2.1 Priestly Texts?

In order to appreciate the very close similarity between Genesis 35 and 48.3–4, it is helpful to place the two passages' constituent parts side by side.

	Elements from Genesis 35.6, 9–12	Elements from Genesis 48.3–4
35.11	אני אל שדי	אל שדי
35.9	וירא אלהים אל-יעקב	נראה-אלי
35.6*	ויבא יעקב ללז	בלז
35.6*	אשר בארץ כנען	בארץ כנען
35.9 <sup>208</sup>	ויברך אתו	ויברך אתי
35.11	פְּרָה וְרָבָה (imperatives)	הנני מפרך והרביתך
35.11	גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך	ונתתיך לקהל עמים
35.12	ואת-הארץ אשר נתתי לאברהם וליצחק לך אתננה	ונתתי את-הארץ הזאת
35.12	ולזרעך אחריך אתן את-הארץ	לזרעך אחריך
	No corresponding phrase	אחוזת עולם

As can be seen, the fullest verbal affinity is specifically with 35.6 (or 6a, to be precise), 9, 11–12.<sup>209</sup> As Westermann notes, it appears that a majority of scholars

<sup>208</sup> Procksch, pp. 379, 540, attributes v. 9 to E and therefore argues that 48.3 is not citing it. This is begging the question. The source-attribution of each verse is not being derived from the features of the text, but the features of the text are being interpreted through their supposed source-attribution.

<sup>209</sup> Scholars have not often treated 35.6 as a part of the parallel, but see Ruppert, p. 163; Wenham, II, 463; de Hoop, p. 334.

have attributed 35.6 (or 35.6a) to P, thus explaining why 48.3–4 contains a reference to it.<sup>210</sup> But what is the reason for this attribution? Most commentators assigning the verse to P make no effort to provide evidence.<sup>211</sup> There just are not many features that can be used as criteria. The two parts of the place name, **לִז** and **בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן**, have generally been the point of departure. Dillmann and Gunkel treated **בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן** as characteristic of P,<sup>212</sup> but Rendtorff has shown that this is simply not true. Rather, ‘this designation is used in all “sources” and layers’.<sup>213</sup>

This leaves **לִז**, but outside of 35.6 and 48.3 this name only appears in Genesis in an undisputed non-P text (28.19), and hardly anyone suggests that **לִז** is characteristic of P.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, as Carr notes, the name **לִז** is taken as evidence against attribution to non-P sources.<sup>215</sup> For Dillmann, for example, verse 6a cannot come from B (his Elohist and the source of vv. 1–8 according to him), because B calls the place **בְּתֵל**, not **לִז**. But this is, in fact, special pleading. If one were to include verse 6 in B/E on other grounds, then B/E not only calls the place

---

<sup>210</sup> Westermann, II, 672. It has never been a full consensus, however. Rendtorff (*Problem*, p. 144) notes that Wellhausen did not attribute v. 6a to P. Driver (p. 309) attributes v. 6 to E, as does Speiser (*Genesis*, pp. 268–71) tentatively, though he confesses that it may be from P. In most cases, little to no evidence is given. The burden of proof, however, is on those perceiving an editorial insertion. Van Seters attributes all of 35.1–8 to the Yahwist (understood by him as all pre-Priestly materials) based on narrative patterns other than blessing formulae (e.g. an itinerary pattern emphasizing place-name aetiologies). John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 211, 256. Carr (p. 107) observes that 35.6 is needed and presupposed by the non-P materials in vv. 7–8, while v. 9 (the beginning of his P section) does not presuppose v. 6.

<sup>211</sup> Procksch, p. 540; Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 424; Von Rad, pp. 335–37; Vawter, p. 360; Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer*, AnBib, 50 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), p. 119; Westermann, II, 672.

<sup>212</sup> Dillmann, p. 357; Gunkel, pp. 342, 350. Dillmann merely appeals to Gen 33.18. Otherwise, the attribution of 35.6 to P is assumed, not argued.

<sup>213</sup> Rendtorff, *Problem*, p. 144.

<sup>214</sup> Outside of Genesis it appears a handful of times in Joshua and Judges—not sufficient evidence that **לִז** is characteristic of P. Procksch (p. 540) explains **לִז** as taken over from J (28.19), but this is special pleading—why would P do this when the surrounding 35.1–5, 6b–9 is an E text (according to Procksch)?

<sup>215</sup> Carr, p. 107. Those who do so include Dillman, p. 357; Gunkel, p. 350; Westermann, II, 672.

‘Luz’ but describes its renaming to Bethel.<sup>216</sup> This kind of reasoning cannot be used as evidence of verse 6’s derivation from A (his Priestly document). Dillmann is, perhaps, the most obviously circular here, which is understandable given the age of his commentary, but this method of reasoning is not too different from that of many subsequent commentators. The end result is that לִּזְרָה, while not a positive characteristic of P, is left to P by default, since it is taken as evidence against attribution to anything else.

The only remaining way one can argue that 35.6 is a P text is very roundabout. Genesis 35.9–13 is generally taken to derive from P. Genesis 48.3–4 reflects 35.9–13 and therefore is also P. But 48.3–4 also reflects 35.6. Therefore, 35.6 is a P text. But there are many other ways to explain these connections, so this manner of reasoning must be rejected, especially in that it leads to methodological circularity. One can never be certain when reading a diachronic analysis (especially source-critical) whether a text T is from source S because it contains phrase P which is characteristic of source S, or whether phrase P is understood to be characteristic of source S because it occurs in text T, which we know to be from S.<sup>217</sup>

Carr, on the other hand, offers a strong argument against the attribution of 35.6 to P:

[T]his verse has no clear P characteristics, and it is immediately followed by a non-P parallel naming tradition for Bethel (Gen. 35:7) for which the preceding reference to Luz in 35:6 prepares. Indeed, the arrival notice in 35:6 is required for all the non-P materials in 35:7–8. In turn, the introduction to the P epiphany in 35:9 does not presuppose 35:6 or 33:18 but instead links seamlessly to the description of Jacob’s departure in 31:17–18. Indeed, as a reference to Jacob’s travels from Padan-Aram, Gen. 35:9 fits better with 31:17–18 than with any material, such as 33:18aβ or 35:6, that implies he has already arrived in Canaan (p. 107 (n. 58)).

Given all the source-critical evidence, if one were still limited to working within the classical Documentary Hypothesis framework, verse 6 is clearly a non-P text.<sup>218</sup>

Fortunately, a post-Documentary Hypothesis methodology offers better solutions.

---

<sup>216</sup> Dillmann, p. 357. He does not even consider the possibility of it being a C (his Yahwist) text.

<sup>217</sup> Also noted by Cassuto, pp. 33-34.

As Carr has noted, nothing in 48.3–6(7) in itself necessarily points to P.<sup>219</sup> It is only its similarity to 35.9–12 that points to P, but this similarity can also be explained as the work of later editors/authors. Dismissing 48.3–7's traditional attribution to P is especially appealing in light of the fact that the textual parallel with chapter 35 also includes verse 6, a text for which, we have concluded, there is not sufficient independent evidence to attribute it to P. Furthermore, as will be seen in section 3.2.3, 48.7 is itself parallel to 35.16–20. The point of all of this is that 48.3–7 actually parallels chapter 35 in its more or less finalized form, crossing all manner of diachronic boundaries. The significance of this for the interpretation of chapter 48 is that we are not justified in reading verses 3–7 in a vacuum. Not only does 48.3–7 knowingly tie Jacob's death-bed story in with the Jacob cycle of chapters 28–35, the diachronic setting of 48.3–7 implied by this renders very likely that these verses are aware of and organically connected to their present setting. They are not the remnant of an originally independent version of death-bed story.

### 3.2.2.2 The Motifs of the *El-Šadday* Promise Texts

If we posit that Genesis 48.3–7 is from an editorial/authorial layer that knows Genesis 35 in its more or less finalized form, how else might it be interacting with Genesis as we know it? While Genesis 35.6–11 is a very close phrasal match for

---

<sup>218</sup> Westermann (II, 672) reverses the order of composition by suggesting that, rather than v. 6 being inserted by P into the Elohist vv. 1–7, vv. 1–7 are, in fact, written by R(edactor) and built around the older v. 6 (still P). But even this does not make P as the source of v. 6 more appealing. His attribution of v. 6 to P is made with no evidence from v. 6 but with a simple appeal to a majority opinion, which, as I have pointed out, is hardly well-founded. Blum's proposal (pp. 35–65) is similar, but less dependent on the Documentary Hypothesis and therefore more compelling. Blum sees vv. 1–5 as a part of a Dtr composition (based on a comparison of motifs with sections from Josh 24, Judg 10, and 1 Sam 7). A Dtr redactor included vv. 6–7, which belong together and are from an earlier tradition, in an artistically structured segment (vv. 1–7) forming an anticipating paradigm for Josh 24.

<sup>219</sup> Carr, p. 90. Carr does attribute vv. 3–7 to P, but he observes there is nothing in vv. 3–6 or 7 that necessarily distinguishes it as independent from its surroundings. Rather, its integration with the surrounding narrative is so thorough that source-analysis must rely on data gleaned elsewhere to even be aware of the seams.



48.3–4, it is not an exact one. A comparison of the two other promise statements attributed to P—17.1–21 and 28.3–4—reveals a grouping of conventional concerns and phrases all its own, a group which has in common four of the six references to God as **אל שדי** in Genesis.

The most obvious points of contrast between 48.3–4 and 35.6–12 are (1) **קהל** (Genesis 48.4) versus **קהל גוים** (Genesis 35.11), and (2) the absence of anything in chapter 35 relating to the description of the land as **אחוזת עולם**. Regarding the former feature, 48.4 finds a more exact match in Genesis 28.3, but one also finds in 17.4–5 **המון גוים** as an essentially synonymous term.<sup>220</sup> Likewise, the latter term, **אחוזת עולם**, a very rare one in the Hebrew Bible which appears to be a specialised legal term,<sup>221</sup> is only elsewhere found in Genesis in 17.8, though both 28.2–4 and 35.6–12 are concerned with divinely appointed possession of the land of Canaan by the Israelites. There are also slight differences in verbal forms between 48.3–4 and 35.6–12, but other than the shift from the imperative mood of the verbs **פרה** and **רבה**

---

<sup>220</sup> Wenham, II, 463; de Hoop, p. 334.

<sup>221</sup> The term **אחוזת עולם** (or **לעולם**) occurs only four times in the Hebrew Bible: Gen 17.8; 48.4; Lev 25.34; and 25.46. The two occurrences in Genesis refer to all the land of Canaan, whereas Lev 25.34 refers specifically to fields surrounding Levite cities, and 25.46 refers to non-Israelite slaves. Semantically, then, the two Genesis occurrences are the most similar to each other. Lev 25.34 distinguishes between houses in Levite cities which may sold and redeemed at any time (or else must be returned in the year of Jubilee) and the fields surrounding these Levite cities which can never be sold, because they are **אחוזת עולם**. Lev 25.46, on the other hand, distinguishes between the treatment and status of Israelite indentured servants (who must be freed in the year of Jubilee and who must not be treated harshly) and non-Israelite slaves (who can be passed on from one generation to another as **אחוזת לעולם**). While these two uses of the term do differ in that the former cannot be sold and the latter can, they are nevertheless basically similar in that there is no custom or legal process which can trump the owner's ownership. The owner of **אחוזת עולם** has unrestricted ownership of the thing possessed, if not absolute rights. Without more instances of the total phrase it is difficult to ascertain whether this is a technical legal term or not, but most uses of **אחוזת** in Genesis (the purchase of the field and cave of Machpelah in ch. 23; recollections of that purchase in 49.30 and 50.13), Lev and Num relates to property law, and this usage is reflected as well in the occurrences of the word in Ezek (15 times in chs 44–48, which is the second highest concentration of uses after Lev 25 and 27). Similarly, the context of the use of **עולם** in Exodus-Numbers (usually connected with **חקה**, **חק**, or **ברית**) points to it being a technical term there when contrasted with its typical use in, for example, the Psalms. Schmid considers **אחוזת עולם** to be a legal term. According to him, the significance of the phrase **אחוזת עולם** has to do with it being depicted as property and as a gift from God. H. H. Schmid, 'אחוז', *THAT*, pp. 107–10.

in 35.11 with Jacob as the subject to the indicative mood in 48.4 with God as the subject, these changes in form are insignificant. Change in verbal mood is, in fact, one of the variables among the four *El-Šadday* promise statements. There appears, then, to be room in the *El-Šadday* Promise pronouncement for some artistic variation, and Jacob's recollection of God's blessing is not entirely textually dependent on 35.6–12 but more generally on the variable Patriarchal Promise tradition, especially those belonging to texts usually attributed to P and that contain the name *El-Šadday*.<sup>222</sup>

*El-Šadday* Blessing/Promise Passages in Genesis

	48.3–4	17.1–9	28.3–4	35.6–12
ID	אל שדי	17.1	28.3	35.11
Appearance	נראה-אלי	17.1	-	35.9
	בלוז	-	-	35.6*
	בארץ כנען	-	-	35.6*
	ויברך אתי	-	28.3	35.9
Blessing(general)	-	ברית—17.4, 7	-	-
	-	לך/להם—17.7, 8 לאלהים	-	-
	-	-	ברכת אברהם—28.4	-

<sup>222</sup> Other Promise texts treat essentially the same concerns but the standard phrases and figures of speech are different (e.g. the emphasis on countless number of descendants and the use of nature similes—descendants will be like the stars of the heavens, the dust of the earth, or the sand of the sea). A tradition-critical treatment of these texts can be found in Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 52-83; Blum, pp. 420-32. That a priestly hand is primarily responsible for these passages is generally accepted. Even Rendtorff, who is highly critical of the Documentary Hypothesis and rejects the idea of a Priestly narrative, supports a layer of Priestly reworking, for which the four *El-Šadday* Promise passages are foundational. McEvenue (pp. 160-76) demonstrates that Gen 17 is a single whole composition. Blum follows him and views it as the foundational passage from which the others derive. It is likely that this *El-Šadday* Promise tradition predates the priestly layer. The manifold ways the motifs are implemented and modified for each context shows either that variations were present in the tradition prior to their implementation by P or (more likely and in agreement with Blum) that P took up the tradition and creatively reworked it into different contexts. The fact that the full parallel with 48.3-7 is 35.6 and not just vv. 9-12, and the fact that v. 6 cannot, in my opinion, be attributed to P (and, according to Blum, is even pre-Exilic), are facts that point to transformative involvement by a later hand (whom we might be able to identify as P).

		17.5—Renaming		35.10—Renaming
Descendants	הגני מפרך והרביתך	17.6 (פרה only)	28.3	35.11
	ונתתיך לקהל עמים	17.4—5 גוים	28.3	קהל גוים—35.11
	-	17.6—מלכים ממך יצאו	-	35.11—מלכים מחלציד יצאו
Land	ונתתי את־הארץ הזאת	17.8	28.4	35.12
	לזרעך אחר־ך	17.8	28.4	35.12
	אחוזת עולם	17.8	לרשתך	-
	-	-	28.4—אשר נתן אלהים לאברהם	35.12—אשר נתתי לאברהם וליצחק
	-	17.8—את ארץ מגריך	28.4—את־ארץ מגריך	-

While phrasal connections are, in this instance, as much a concern as motivic similarities, the same basic structure also describes most of the other Promise statements in Genesis (whether theophanic or otherwise). The conventions relating to theophanies are common to more than just Genesis,<sup>223</sup> but the content and structure of the Patriarchal Promise unifies several different passages, some of which are not theophanies (like Genesis 28.3–4).

Although one should take care not to over-interpret minute variations in structural patterns, it is at least worth asking whether some of the differences among the *El-Šadday* Patriarchal Promise scenes compared in the table above might reveal something about an individual instance. Of particular interest are the references: (1) to Abraham and Isaac; (2) to kings among the descendants; and (3) to ‘sojourning.’ Each occurs in two of the other passages but not in 48.3–4. The absence of the latter two makes some sense in that, even though this is Jacob’s recollection, the relevance of the recollection is for the two grandsons he is about to adopt officially. Since the final form of Genesis very likely comes from an historical perspective which is

<sup>223</sup> See especially George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup 420 (London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

aware of the Israelite monarchy and of the tribe of Judah's significance in this regard (49.8–12), a reference to kings in this context would be an inaccurate foundation for the adoption and tribal blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>224</sup> Likewise, the two grandsons had never lived in Canaan and never would,<sup>225</sup> so talk of it being the land of sojourning, while technically accurate since this is Jacob's recollection of a blessing on him, is irrelevant in the present context.

The failure to mention Abraham and Isaac is a little more difficult to explain as meaningful. It could, perhaps, be due to the fact that the blessing Manasseh and Ephraim are receiving as Joseph's sons is not one of exclusive claim to the covenant or blessing of God. That covenant is to be shared with Joseph's eleven brothers.<sup>226</sup> It may be, then, that the author/editor considered setting the adoption and blessing of chapter 48 within the context of the line Abraham-Isaac-Jacob to be something of an overstatement. However, the blessing of 48.15–16 invokes just that sort of context, so one is left with the little interpretive recourse other than an appeal to intuitive aesthetic variation.

The use of these comparisons as evidence for tradition-critical layering is risky. If, as Blum and McEvenue argue, Genesis 17 is a whole composition and the original *El-Šadday* Promise scene whose content is consciously emulated in the other three passages (28.3–4; 35.9–15; 48.3–4), there can be no certain dating of the

---

<sup>224</sup> And, perhaps, rhetorically contradictory, if the point is to tell the story of Joseph in such a way that all predictions of royalty in relation to him are strategically eliminated or nullified—in other words, to support a Judahite monarchy over against an Ephraimite monarchy. See de Hoop's conclusions (pp. 568–74).

<sup>225</sup> The possibility notwithstanding that 1 Chr 7.20–29 preserves an old alternative tradition where Ephraim (and possibly Manasseh) lived their lives in Canaan (as in Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), pp. 223–31), from the perspective of the Pentateuch, at least, they never lived in Canaan.

<sup>226</sup> Another related contrast between 48.3–4 and the other passages is that 48.3–4 is not technically a bestowal of the Promise but a memory of a bestowal. The Promise is applied to Manasseh and Ephraim inasmuch as the historical prologue justifies the following adoption, but it is not passed to them directly through a theophanic encounter or a blessing (as in 28.3–4). This may have to do with the fact that they are not exclusive recipients of the Promise.

emulating texts based on the conventional features of the *El-Šadday* Promise motifs—the style could have been emulated at any point in the compositional process.

What can be drawn from these comparisons is that Genesis 48.3–4 concludes the *El-Šadday* Promise theme and ties Jacob’s adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim into the larger narrative of Genesis. Furthermore, when this is considered in conjunction with 48.3–7’s relationship to chapter 35 as a whole, 48.3–7 appears to be from a very late stage in the compositional process (assuming there were earlier stages). It should not be read as irrelevant to or independent of its present setting.

### 3.2.3 THE INTENTION TO ADOPT AND ITS JUSTIFICATION

Verse 5 consists of two parallel phrases. The first more fully describes the birth situations of Joseph’s sons. The initial word of verse 5, ועתה, is (among other things) a standard way to introduce a temporal or logical apodosis. Within a contractual setting, it begins the section pertaining to actions or commands which find their logical foundation in a preceding historical prologue.<sup>227</sup>

The second phrase of verse 5 expands upon the predicate לִיָּהֵם by comparing Ephraim and Manasseh’s new status with Reuben and Simeon. The choice to pair Ephraim and Manasseh with Reuben and Simeon specifically (as opposed to some other conventional pairing of sons, like Simeon/Levi, Reuben/Judah, Issachar/Zebulun, Dan/Naphtali, or Gad/Asher) shows that Jacob is adopting them as more than just two sons.<sup>228</sup> They are equated with the first two of Jacob’s sons, who

<sup>227</sup> Exod 19.5; Deut 10.12; Josh 24.14. See James Muilenburg, ‘Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations’, *VT* 9, no. 4 (1959), 347–65; H. A. Brongers, ‘Bemerkungen zum Gebrauch des Adverbialen we‘attāh im Alten Testament’, *VT* 15, no. 3 (1965), 289–99; Lowenthal, p. 136; de Hoop, p. 334; Blum, pp. 251–52; BDB, p. 774; *DCH*, vi, 636–38; *HALOT*, ii, 902.

<sup>228</sup> Most treat Reuben and Simeon merely as examples from among the brothers. Hamilton (ii, 629) notes the unique choice of Reuben and Simeon for comparison but attributes it to Jacob’s desire to be clear that Ephraim and Manasseh will have total equality. De Hoop (pp. 337–39) points out that בראובן ושמעון יהיו־לי is phrased emphatically, indicating that the selection of Reuben and Simeon is based on more than just their status as sons. However, de Hoop’s conclusion based on this observation—that the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh is not a positive event for Joseph in that it wipes out Joseph’s

are not otherwise paired, and this, combined with the rejection of Reuben and Simeon as recipients of the birthright, which only becomes explicit (and official) in chapter 49, shows that Manasseh and Ephraim are being adopted in place of Reuben and Simeon in the inheritance priority, that is they are presented in the role of Worthy Successors, while Reuben and Simeon are the Unworthy Competitors (shown in this scene by their absence from Jacob's bedside, which is highlighted by the mention of their names).<sup>229</sup> Neither Manasseh nor Ephraim, however, is a birthright recipient individually. Rather, they are together the substance of the birthright inheritance which is given to Joseph.<sup>230</sup> This is made clear by the inclusion of all subsequent

---

name—misses the conventional plot structuring and characterisation within the story and cannot be maintained. Contrary to de Hoop's assertion, the interpretation that Ephraim and Manasseh are hereby raised into positions of inheritance priority does explain the emphatic syntax of 48.5b. De Hoop's meta-narrative of Joseph's character and development (i.e. Joseph has exalted himself and neglected his family; now he is receiving his comeuppance) is not unique to him. See also Turner, *Announcements*, p. 163; Ron Pirson, *The Lord of Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37-50*, JSOTSup, 355 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 121, 141; W. Friedemann Golka, 'Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?', *CurBR*, 2 (2004), 153–77 (p. 160). I do not think a negative portrait of Joseph is justified, given the overwhelmingly positive depiction of Joseph following Jacob's death.

<sup>229</sup> Cotter, p. 324; B. J. van der Merwe, 221–32 (p. 226). If the (essentially) final form of Gen 35 is in view, as argued above, then the mention of Reuben may bring to mind 35.22, his disqualifying action.

<sup>230</sup> Von Rad, p. 415; Lowenthal, p. 136. De Hoop's assertion (p. 338) that this is not a positive event for Joseph is based on his view that the adoption means that Manasseh and Ephraim are no longer Joseph's sons, that it wipes out his name. In modern Western law, a child can only be adopted by someone if that child's previous parents no longer have parental rights (whether they have given them up or a government has removed those rights), so adoption is about a change of identity. In ancient Near Eastern law, especially in cases of adult adoption, contracts from Nuzi show that, at least there, the adoption of a man in no way nullifies the adopted one's prior relationships with living parents. In HSS v, no. 72, a will, the testator Zigi stipulates that 'his son' Shennima, who had been adopted by Zigi's brother Shurihilu and had received all his property (HSS v, no. 67), would not receive any share of Zigi's estate along with his other two sons. The fact that he calls Shennima 'my son' and that it is considered appropriate or even necessary to mention Shennima in his will shows that their relationship had not been severed by Shurihilu's adoption of Shennima. Adoption, then, is demonstrably more about the adding of identities than the severing of identities, at least in some circumstances. Admittedly, adoption in Nuzi may be something of a special case, but whether that is indeed true, and to what extent, remains unclear. Even so, like the cases in the Nuzi texts, the adoption in Gen 48 is about the adding of identities but not their removal. Manasseh and Ephraim do not cease being Joseph's sons (hence Gen 50.23), but now they have the added identity through a legal fiction of being Jacob's sons, as well. Rachel's and Leah's roles in the births of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah in Gen 30 do not stop the four sons from being identified as the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, rather than of Rachel and Leah (Gen 30 does not describe a series of adoptions—see section 6.5.1.1). While

children of Joseph under the names of Manasseh and Ephraim in verse 6, since this means that Joseph will receive no other inheritance.<sup>231</sup> The specific implementation of the Worthy Successor conventions in this story blends the role of Successor and Agent in Joseph and splits the role of Successor between Joseph and his sons.

The mention of other children of Joseph finds no parallel anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. This is not an indication of a now lost ancient tradition wherein Joseph had more children. This is contractual language, a hypothetical scenario which may or may not come to pass. Compare, for example the pre-nuptial agreements in numerous ancient Near Eastern marriage contracts concerning possible eventualities like divorce, barrenness, the banning of other full wives and allowing for concubines or secondary wives, inheritance apportionments for the children of different wives, etc.<sup>232</sup> The mention of possible other children for Joseph is perfectly in keeping with a legal-ritual interpretation of this text.

Verse 7 continues the historical review, basing Jacob's decision to adopt Manasseh and Ephraim on the story of the death and burial of Rachel. How does this memory justify the present course of action? Does it actually stand in any causal relationship with any of the events around it? Von Rad voices what has been at least the initial assessment of most commentators when he concludes, 'The reference to

---

adoption in modern Western law is primarily about the custodianship of children (there are still exceptional cases of adult adoption), adoption in the ancient Near East was very commonly a means of estate planning (so adult adoption was more common). Joseph's position is only exalted in ch. 48, not diminished.

<sup>231</sup> This also speaks against Steiner's suggestion ('Enslavement', 73-75) that Joseph has no legal connection to Jacob, and that the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim establishes an alternate legal connection (since Jacob no longer has the status to re-adopt Joseph?). If Steiner's recreation of the legal scenario were accurate, why would Joseph's subsequent sons have any share in Manasseh's and Ephraim's inheritance? The adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim and the inclusion in them of Joseph's hypothetical subsequent progeny is grounded in Jacob's legal relationship to Joseph.

<sup>232</sup> These documents are too numerous to list, but E. A. Speiser, 'New Kirkuk Documents Relating to Family Laws', in *AASOR*, 10 (*ASOR*, 1928-29), pp. 1-73, contains a large number of marriage and adoption contracts with just these sorts of hypothetical clauses.

Rachel's death has no recognizable relation to what follows or precedes.<sup>233</sup> Those who voice such confusion typically explain the presence of verse 7 as a side-effect of various kinds of editorial activity. Particularly a century ago, verse 7 was more naturally connected with the continuation of the P story (49.29–32),<sup>234</sup> or else it was viewed as an inadvertently severed justification for another burial request, possibly that of 47.29–31 (a request in whose original context, presumably, the place of burial was to be Ephrath rather than the cave at Machpelah).<sup>235</sup> The reason for seeking a new location for the memory in verse 7 is that it is felt to be either irrelevant to the story or inappropriately abrupt. But both of these assessments are almost entirely subjective. Irrelevance, in general, is not so much an inherent feature of a text as it is of the reading of the interpreter. Furthermore, the perception of the abruptness of the memory of Rachel's death has been a good deal overstated by scholars, not being founded on observable features of the text, like syntax (a broken sentence, for example), but on content (the reliability of whose evaluation depends more heavily on the reader's competence). Though Westermann holds that the verse is irrelevant, ('The legitimization [of the following action] concludes with verse 6; verse 7 has no function in it.'), nevertheless, following Budde,<sup>236</sup> he dismisses the supposed abruptness of the memory by noting that verse 7 relates to Genesis 35.16–20 as

---

<sup>233</sup> Von Rad, pp. 414–5; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12–50*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 294; Vawter, p. 452.

<sup>234</sup> Karl Budde, 'Genesis 48,7 und die benachbarten Abschnitte', *ZAW*, 3 (1883), 56–86, p. 68; Delitzsch, pp. 506–7; Driver, p. 376. Interestingly, Schmitt (p. 67) points to the use of 'Paddan' as the name for Mesopotamia as the feature above all that points to P. But Paddan only occurs in v. 7, whose attribution to P is very often doubted, or at least whose appropriateness for its current context has been questioned (this has led some to rearrange the P fragments into a more coherent whole). Furthermore, Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 142–43, points out that 'Paddan' is not the definitive proof of P it was once thought to be, occurring also in Gen 46.15, whose attribution is questionable.

<sup>235</sup> C. Bruston, 'La Mort et la Sépulture de Jacob', *ZAW*, 7 (1887), 202–210 (pp. 207–8). Others attributed this verse to E: Gunkel, p. 427; Procksch, pp. 420–23. Skinner, pp. 504–5, finds this solution initially attractive but fails to find a more satisfying setting for the verse; similar is Driver, p. 376; more recently, Vawter, p. 452.

<sup>236</sup> Budde, 56–86, p. 77.



verses 3–4 relate to 35.6–11. He concludes that a later transmitter must have wanted to expand verses 3–6 to reflect all of chapter 35, which was received as an inherently connected unit of tradition.<sup>237</sup> But the acknowledgement that verses 3–7 as a whole reflect chapter 35 as a whole, especially in light of the fact that verses 3–5 and 35.6 cannot independently be assigned to P, would seem to remove all foundation for separating out verse 7 even in the qualified manner of Westermann.<sup>238</sup> That is, of course, unless one insists on reading verse 7 as a non-sequitur.

Part of the perceived inappropriateness of verse 7 has to do with the fact that it occurs after the consequent action, separated from the other legitimising history in verses 3–4. But a look at other contract passages, in particular the covenant events of Exodus 19.3–6 and Joshua 24, shows that the introduction of a new legitimising foundation after the initial consequence clause (introduced by ועתה) is not at all unusual. Exodus 19.3–6, for example begins (after the speech introduction) with a historical review upon which is based the following condition and promise (which is introduced by ועתה). But after the promise is a further logical justification: for all the earth is mine. Similarly, Joshua 24.2–13 is a historical review and 24.14–15 is an ultimatum of exclusive devotion based on that history. Both 24.16–18 (the response of the Israelites) and Joshua's next speech starting in 24.19 contain further justifications for God's demand for exclusivity, the former historical, the latter logical. The first ten chapters of Deuteronomy, moreover, contain a good bit of

---

<sup>237</sup> Westermann, III, 186; Van Seters, p. 320. This diachronic supposition is also supported by the argument above that vv. 3–4 do not simply reflect the P material of 35.9–11, but also the arguably non-P material of v. 6. However, Westermann's solution to the present question (concerning the nature of the literary relationship of 48.7 to the surrounding material) is incomplete at best and ignores the context's concern with causal relationships between past and present. Amos (p. 266) and Sarna (p. 326) integrate this diachronic explanation with a synchronic one.

<sup>238</sup> Blum (pp. 250–53) regards 48.3–7 as an coherent and intentional unit from a later layer than the surrounding vv. 1–2, 8–14, 16–20. See also Redford, pp. 22, 180; de Hoop, pp. 471–72. On the other hand, Ruppert (p. 163) maintains a strict source-critical division, assigning 48.7 to E because of his attribution of 35.16–19 to E. So also Donner, *Gestalt*, p. 31 (n. 49).

alternation between historical justifications, commands based on the history, further logical and historical justifications, further commands, etc. Therefore, in light of other examples of contractual literary structures, the conclusion of a consequence clause with another legitimisation, whether historical or logical, is not uncommon. Any structural argument against verse 7's appropriateness is unfounded. But how does verse 7 function to legitimise the intentions of verses 5–6?

There has been no shortage of attempts to find the synchronic logic behind verse 7's presence here. Coats relates the recollection of Rachel's death to the mood of the passage as a death-bed scene.<sup>239</sup> Others appeal to Jacob's presumed emotional state as he is approaching death without necessarily seeing a causal relationship between the remembered past and the present.<sup>240</sup> Seebaß (29–43 (p. 30)) suggests that verse 7 is a reminder to Israelite readers to reflect on the loss of Rachel. Focusing on the burial place rather than on the event of the death of Rachel, Rashi interprets verse 7, in connection with the preceding burial request, as a sort of apology for not taking the effort to bury Rachel in the family tomb.<sup>241</sup> More recently, the focus on the burial place has been understood to re-emphasise the necessity of Jacob's burial request and the return to Canaan without asserting a particular history of composition.<sup>242</sup> However, by far the simplest, most convincing, and best integrated reading of verse 7 is that by awarding the birthright to Joseph and dividing his inheritance into two tribes he is acting on his desire to honour his favourite wife, Rachel, and to give her more offspring, since she died prematurely before she was able to have more children

---

<sup>239</sup> Coats, *Genesis*, p. 304.

<sup>240</sup> Cotter, p. 324; Delitzsch (pp. 506–7) speculates a good bit about Jacob's psychological state but unlike Cotter also discusses causal links between the memory and Jacob's present actions. Hartley (p. 351) sees this as a recollection of family history by Jacob for the benefit of his grandsons.

<sup>241</sup> Rashi, pp. 239–40. Sarna (p. 326) notes that this is a common view among medieval Rabbinic interpreters.

<sup>242</sup> Wenham, II, 463; Hamilton, II, 630; Matthews, II, 876.

after Benjamin.<sup>243</sup> Verse 7 is, in fact, the only justification offered in the death-bed story specifically for the selection of Joseph's sons as the Worthy Successor(s), since verses 3–4 provide a broader theological context for inheritance issues in general but not for the selection of Joseph, strictly speaking.<sup>244</sup>

This interpretation may find support in the conventions of the death-bed story. The selection of Joseph as the Worthy Successor is based on a special relationship of the dying character with the mother of the Successor. This may also be the case in 1 Kings 1 (no other wife of David is mentioned here, only Abishag the concubine).<sup>245</sup> In the case of Isaac, his selection over the other options is based on his status as the son of Sarah (17.18–21; though there the differing social and legal statuses of the wives also plays a role; no such factor distinguishes between the sons of Leah and Rachel). So the recollection of Rachel's death and burial here is not only fitting for structural reasons (i.e. the connection of 48.3–7 with 35.6–21) and logical reasons (justifying the division of Joseph into two inheritances/tribes), but also because the choosing of a Worthy Successor on account of a special relationship between the dying character and the Successor's mother may very well be conventional (though the sample group in this case is too small to be certain).

---

<sup>243</sup> Delitzsch, p. 506; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 359; Blum, p. 252; Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 278; Arnold, p. 375; Matthews, II, 875; Hamilton, II, 630; Amos, p. 266; Sarna, p. 326; de Hoop, p. 334; Wilson, p. 197. As noted, this view does not preclude a plausible diachronic explanation, as shown especially by the multi-faceted interpretations of Delitzsch, Amos, and Sarna. However, it does assert compositional intentionality in the placement of v. 7 and a causal relationship with the rest of chapter 48.

<sup>244</sup> Blum (p. 252) is correct that vv. 5–6 present the adoption of Joseph's sons as a fulfilment of the promise to make Jacob fruitful, but this promise is also fulfilled in Jacob's other sons and their children.

Regarding the redactional purpose of gloss in v. 7b, Rendsburg (pp. 87–88) notes a series of verbal and thematic connections between the encounter with Potiphar's wife in ch. 39 and the events of ch. 48. According to his analysis of the Joseph story, these two accounts occupy counterpart positions in an overall chiasmic structure. In particular, Rendsburg notes the common occurrence of לָחֵם in both contexts (39.6 and 48.7b).

<sup>245</sup> B. J. van der Merwe, 221–32 (pp. 228–29).

In summary, Genesis 48.3–7 forms a coherent segment within the second Episode of Jacob's death-bed story, a segment which resembles sections of covenant formulae (such as those found in Exodus 19.3–6 and Joshua 24) containing historical prologues justifying the connected actions or commands. Such reviews of relevant historical events are also at home in the conventional death-bed story, showing that the death-bed story generally is a context for legal and religious ritual. As a whole, 48.3–7 reflects the events and order of chapter 35. Verses 3–4 are consistent with typical Priestly/*El-Šadday* Promise statements (occurring either in theophanies or in human blessing events). They are especially close to 35.9–12, but the mention of לֹא and בארץ כנען point more strongly to verse 6. The particular form of the Promise in verses 3–4 is especially appropriate for the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh in that it excludes mentions of future kings and verbiage which applies to those who have lived in Canaan. The following adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim is thus set in the theological context of God's promise of land and descendants. Verses 5–6 compare Manasseh and Ephraim to Reuben and Simeon, a pairing of the two oldest of the brothers which does not otherwise occur and which can only signify that Manasseh and Ephraim are being accepted as Joseph's birthright. Verse 7 continues the review of history and specifically justifies the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim in light of a special relationship between Jacob and Rachel. The existence of such a special relationship appears to be conventional in death-bed stories concerned with the selection of a Successor. Contrary to scholars who would excise verse 7 as unnaturally abrupt or irrelevant, I assert that not only is it an organic part of the subsection of verses 3–7, it also has a unique function not fulfilled elsewhere in the entire death-bed story.

### 3.2.4 THE ADOPTION (GENESIS 48.8–12)

Diachronic study of 48.1–20 has had very mixed results. Source-critics seem to have been stumped, finding between one and four different sources in the chapter.<sup>246</sup> The only consensus is that 48.3–6 is a P text to which verse 7 was appended. The remainder of the chapter has been variously identified as E,<sup>247</sup> JE,<sup>248</sup> or some other combination of traditional materials.<sup>249</sup> Other kinds of inquiry have more successfully identified the natural contours of the present form with a division between verses 12 and 13,<sup>250</sup> albeit with some perception of redundancy. According to one view, two traditions of the adoption/blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48.1–12 and 13–20) have been preserved right next to each other without any concerted attempt at

---

<sup>246</sup> Carr (p. 255 (n. 67)) isolates what have historically been the primary indicators of seams in chapter 48: (1) the double presentation of Joseph's sons in 48.10b and 13; (2) the inconsistency in Jacob's vision; (3) the perception that vv. 15–16 interrupt the flow of the narrative. Carr himself rejects the first two indicators, but retains the third. This last point will be treated briefly later on, but it is far from certain that even it requires a diachronic explanation.

<sup>247</sup> Driver, pp. 375–78. This division predates the Graf-Wellhausen Documentary Hypothesis. De Wette appears to be the first to detect a source change from v. 7 to v. 8, but his reasoning is based on historical rather than textual concerns. According to de Wette, the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim in vv. 3–7 is the earlier and more historical of the two passages (belonging to the *Urschrift*). The prioritization of Ephraim comes from the monarchical period in order to justify an Ephraimite kingship. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Kritik der Israelitischen Geschichte*, 2 vols, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Halle: Schimmelpfennig, 1807), I, 162–64; see also Hupfeld, pg. 4.

<sup>248</sup> Dillmann, pp. 428–31; Von Rad, p. 415; Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 354–56. Noth (*History*, p. 34) considers it and much of the surrounding non-P material to be a primarily J narrative with special E material interspersed. Vergote (p. 196) essentially follows Noth with some idiosyncratic variation (as in attributing vv. 5–6 to E, since otherwise the E strand would have no preserved adoption tradition).

<sup>249</sup> Westermann, III, 203–204; Redford, pp. 22–24 (the whole chapter derives from the latest hand, the Genesis Editor, out of different materials); Schmitt, pp. 66–73; Carr, pp. 210, 253–54; de Hoop, pp. 472–91.

<sup>250</sup> This is almost universally agreed upon, though Wenham (II, 460) divides the scene between vv. 10 and 11. The movement of the two lads away from Jacob and then back and Joseph's bowing both create a break in the dialogue and subject matter which is the strongest such break in the chapter. Westermann, III, 187; de Hoop, p. 341; Seebaß, 29–43, p. 30; Matthews, II, 877–8; Waltke, p. 598. Seebaß sees v. 12 as a transition and specifically not as a conclusion, but his reasoning, which is based on the motion of the characters, is similar.

harmonization.<sup>251</sup> The only features which might indicate a doublet, however, are the introduction of the sons and the blessing of them, both of which are too non-specific to be conclusive.<sup>252</sup> Beyond this the two segments are different in detail and purpose.<sup>253</sup> The conventions of the death-bed type-scene offer a better explanation for these apparent redundancies, particularly those features relating to the type-scene as a context for ritual and to the Selection of the Worthy Successor.

---

<sup>251</sup> Westermann, III, 182; Donner, *Gestalt*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>252</sup> Regarding the double presentation, multiple presentations/summonings even without a formal withdrawal of the addressee also shapes 1 Kgs 1. In this first Episode of David's death-bed story, Bathsheba approaches David and speaks, then Nathan does so. David then summons Bathsheba and speaks to her, after which he summons Nathan and others and gives them orders. The summoning of Bathsheba and Nathan are frequently taken to imply their departure in the meantime, but this is over-interpretation. The death-bed is much like a throne, and to come before it is essentially to be given 'the floor' to speak. One can withdraw from the 'floor' without withdrawing from the stage. The scene in 1 Kgs 1 is a not a round table discussion, but a series of one-on-one conversations in an ordered manner. This is not to say that multiple presentations of an addressee are not a typical part of the death-bed type-scene, but rather that ritual contexts and situations before an important figure have a particular kind of choreography. This one-on-one nature is also characteristic of Hebrew narrative in general, so we are not warranted in reading diachronic development or any implication of departure from the stage simply because of this convention. Alter, *Narrative*, p. 72; see Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 148-49, for a discussion of the condensation of speech in Hebrew narrative.

<sup>253</sup> Coats (*Genesis*, p. 303) sees no structural duplication in Gen 47.28-50.14 that would indicate parallel sources, but he does consider the adoption and blessing as independent traditions which have been incorporated into a single narrative. See also Coats, 'Redactional', 15–21 (pp. 18-19). Such duplication, as Coats observes, simply 'facilitates the function of the report as a framework for independent units' and probably corresponds to repetitions of summoning formulae, approaching death motifs, etc. I find myself in agreement with Coats on a number of points. The death-bed type-scene, comparable to what he calls the death report, does in fact function as a conventional plot structure into which it is appropriate to insert all sorts of related material. This material gets inserted in the Testament section as I have described it as a part of the final words of the dying character, or into an Epilogue as a fulfilment of some aspect of the dying character's final words. I differ from Coats in that I feel his conclusions about the pre-history of the text based on these observations are premature in light of the concept of conventional plot structuring (type-scenes) as a compositional (and not simply a redactional) technique.

### 3.2.4.1 The Confirming Dialogue (Genesis 48.8–9a)

Death-bed stories frequently act as a context for ritual, whether legal or religious.<sup>254</sup>

This ritual is observable through certain characteristics, including specialised legal or religious vocabulary or phrasing, antiphonal dialogue or actions, heightened attention to precise details of movement and action, and a certain amount of repetitiveness.

Like other examples of the death-bed story, Jacob's story is a context for ritual, especially where it is formalising or legitimating the selection of Joseph as Worthy Successor, as in Jacob's adoption of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. It was also demonstrated above that Genesis 48.3–7 follows closely a pattern found among covenant formulae in the Hebrew Bible, namely in presenting an historical prologue that justifies actions or commands given thereafter. In particular, Exodus 19.3–6 and Joshua 24.2–15 are comparable to 48.3–7 in structure and content. Certain features of similarity continue even beyond verse 7.

In Exodus 19.7, the covenant formula is followed by a set of confirming actions. The first is a verbal response from the Israelite elders, and the second is a

---

<sup>254</sup> What constitutes a 'ritual' is a matter of debate and not one I can avoid completely. However, this thesis is not the appropriate context for an attempt to define ritual, nor am I sufficiently qualified for that task. Like the word 'game', 'ritual' is a rather slippery concept, but it is possible to identify a set of family resemblances. In this I follow the lead of Jan A. M. Snoek, 'Defining "Rituals"', in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek and Michael Stausberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 3–14 (pp. 11–14), who moves toward describing 'ritual behaviour' rather than ritual:

Ritual behavior is a particular mode of behavior, distinguished from common behavior. Its performers are (at least part of) its own audience. In general, all human actions can be part of ritual behavior, including speech acts. However, in each particular case the large majority of these will be traditionally sanctioned as proper ritual actions. Most ritual behavior takes place at specific places and/or specific times. Most ritual behavior is more formally stylized, structured, and based on a script. Most ritual behavior is to some extent purposeful and symbolically meaningful for its participants. At least those playing an active part consider themselves to be participating in non-common behavior. (p. 13)

Snoek does not pretend that this is a comprehensive definition. Other common aspects of ritual behaviour mentioned by Snoek but not appearing in the above description include redundancy, a function in organizing society, and a function in creating change or transition. See also Bell, *Ritual*, esp. pp. 138–70, for another helpful description of the features of ritual behaviour.

lengthy passage detailing the preparation for and experience of the appearance of Yahweh in the storm cloud at Sinai. The same basic structure is found in Joshua 24.16–27. First are a series of verbal responses from the Israelites in response to commands and challenges from Joshua, followed by the writing of the covenant in a book and the setting up of a stone to commemorate the event. In both cases, antiphonal, confirming dialogue is followed by a confirming event or ritual.

Genesis 48.8–12 shares this structure. After the historical prologue and general announcement of the intention of the encounter in verses 3–7, the question of identity in verses 8–9 occurs in the place where we would expect a confirming dialogue. The kiss and embrace followed by Joseph bowing to the ground are confirming actions akin to the appearance at Sinai in Exodus 19 or to the stone monument in Joshua 24.

In 48.8, Israel sees Joseph's sons, who have been present, and asks: 'Who are these?' What is Jacob's reason for asking this question? There are three non-mutually exclusive possibilities. First, Jacob may not recognise Joseph's sons because he has never met them. Those who espouse this view typically see two chronologies at work in Jacob's death-bed story.<sup>255</sup> The P chronology places these events 17 years after Jacob's migration to Egypt (so Joseph's sons are around 20 years old), while the other chronology (J, JE or Joseph novella) places the events immediately following the migration (so portraying the two lads as very young boys). The identification of the two boys occurs in a text belonging to the latter chronology, so it would appear that in the context of the question Jacob has not yet had a chance to meet Manasseh and Ephraim. This hypothesis is essentially an argument from silence, being based not on anything present in the text but rather on an absence of a previous meeting narrative.

---

<sup>255</sup> Dillmann, p. 429; Gunkel, p. 427; Procksch, p. 423; Von Rad, p. 415; Vawter, p. 455; Westermann, III, 186.



Second, Jacob may not recognise them because he cannot make them out visually.<sup>256</sup> This interpretation of the question is supported by the narrator comment in verse 10 that Jacob's eyes were dim with age (כבדו מזקן) and he was not able to see (לא יוכל לראות), so that unlike the first view, this one has the advantage of explicit textual support.<sup>257</sup>

A third possibility is that Jacob is here initiating a conventional dialogue, a ritual 'recognition'.<sup>258</sup> Jacob is still acting under the name Israel. Assuming the

---

<sup>256</sup> Delitzsch, p. 507; Coats, *Genesis*, p. 305; acknowledged by Wenham, II, 464. Jacob's blindness is sometimes taken as connotative of shame, chiefly comparing with effects of the same detail in Gen 27 (Isaac), Deut 28.28 (as a curse from Yahweh), Judg 16 (Samson) and 1 Sam 3-4 (Eli), while contrasting with Moses in Deut 34.7. However, as Skinner (p. 396) points out, blindness often appears simply 'as a frequent concomitant of old age', even where clearly no shame is intended, as in 1 Kgs 14.4 where Ahijah's blindness may actually heighten his honour, showing him spiritually perceptive despite his physical blindness. Hector Avalos, 'Blindness', *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 193. While Moses' condition at death in Deut 34 (that is, full physical strength) is the ideal, it should not be taken as the measure any contrast with which is indicative of shame. Motifs like blindness do not work as an on/off switch. The blindness of Isaac, especially, is often over-interpreted. Sternberg, pp. 349-50; Hamilton, II, 212. A better approach to the significance of the motif in Isaac's case may be to view it through the lens of comedy without invoking the moral concept of shame. See Gunkel, p. 282; J. Cheryl Exum and J. William Whedbee, 'Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions', in *Beyond Form Criticism*, ed. Paul R. House, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 272-308 (pp. 284-5); J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 1st Fortress Press edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

<sup>257</sup> This detail has at times been seized upon by some who see here a contradiction with וירא in 48.8, and herein perceive a seam between the J and E versions of the story. Gunkel, p. 427; Procksch, p. 269; Skinner, p. 505. More recently, however, commentators tend to see no contradiction here, noting that v. 10 does not necessarily mean total blindness, and v. 8 does not require a clear perception of the boys. Westermann, III, 187; Von Rad, p. 415; Carr, p. 255; Hamilton, II, 633; de Hoop (p. 475-76) points out that the idiom לא יוכל לראות does not elsewhere indicate total blindness (Gen 44.26; Exod 10.5; 33.20; 11 Sam 17.17; Ps 40.13); Matthews, II, 876-77. Waltke (p. 598) compares the way we might today describe elderly people with macular degeneration as both able and not able to see, depending on the context. However, Lowenthal's translation of ראה as 'recognize' (with an implied object 'them') goes too far (p. 138). While the range of ראה does cross that of English 'recognize', it is only really in becoming cognizant of circumstances (often followed by כי or אשר), as in Gen 1.4 and 3.6 (ידע is also used this way, as in Gen 3.7). For the use of 'recognize' meaning to perceive the identity of a previously known object or individual, a better verb (and more thematic in Genesis and in the Joseph narrative) would be the Hiphil of נכר, as in Gen 27.23 (where, earlier in the chapter, ראה is also used of Isaac with the meaning 'to see'); 37.33; 38.26; and 42.7-8.

<sup>258</sup> Sarna, p. 327; Wenham, II, 464; Hamilton, II, 633-34; Matthews, II, 876; Arnold, p. 375; Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 279; Waltke, p. 597; Wilson, p. 197. Coats (*Genesis*, p. 305) appears to be

synchronic explanation for the name Israel offered earlier applies here as well, just as the name marks the sitting up of 48.2 as a formal inheritance-related action, so also his seeing and asking ‘who are these’ is formal. Since other features of this text point to legal ritual forms found in Exodus 19, Joshua 24 and elsewhere, the third possibility, like the second, has further textual support. Only the first possibility, that Jacob does not recognise the lads because he has never met them, has no foundation in anything present in the surrounding text. While these three views are not mutually exclusive, the lack of support in the surrounding narrative for the first view supports a combination of the latter two views: Jacob’s question of identification is motivated both by his poor eyesight and by the ritual context.<sup>259</sup> Further support for the third view can be discerned in the nature of Joseph’s reply in verse 9.

Joseph’s reply to Jacob’s question has some interesting characteristics. First, it is noteworthy that Joseph does not refer to Manasseh and Ephraim by name. Second, the reply gives a lot of extra information if the point of the answer is simply to identify two individuals that Jacob cannot make out due to his poor sight. Third, the phrasing of the response is very similar (though not identical) to Jacob’s answer to Esau’s question *מי אלה לך* in 33.5.

The lack of personal names in Joseph’s response has been taken by various commentators to imply both Jacob’s familiarity with his grandsons<sup>260</sup> and his lack of familiarity with them.<sup>261</sup> While it is my opinion that it is more likely that the

---

observing something similar when he writes, ‘As a unit, [48.1-12] present a Report of a legal process for adoption.’

<sup>259</sup> A fourth option is that Gen 48.8-9 is here to echo the identification issue of Gen 27. This has less to do with character motivation and more to do with narrative strategy, so it is nonsensical to offer it as an alternative to the three above-mentioned character motivations. This ‘fourth option’ does not replace them, but is, on the contrary, fully compatible with any of them (as can be seen in the following paragraphs).

<sup>260</sup> Wenham, II, 464; followed by Matthews, II, 876.

<sup>261</sup> Westermann, III, 186. As a third option, Lowenthal (pp. 137-38) sees the lack of names as a polite gesture on Joseph’s behalf, not correcting his father who has already referred to them in v. 5 in reverse

surrounding narrative depicts Jacob as being familiar with them, the lack of personal names in Joseph's response is not evidence of this. On the contrary, once one considers the connotations of various kinds of hypothetical responses to questions of identity, this detail points either to a lack of previous personal familiarity or to a ritual function of the response.

Though we cannot assume conversational implicature in Biblical Hebrew to be identical to that in English, neither can we assume complete dissimilarity between the way conversational implicature works in the two languages. While it is possible that a different cultural or linguistic setting can have a significant impact on conversational implicature, its basic features appear to hold regardless of linguistic setting, being based, apparently, on human psychology rather than strictly on the conventions of any specific language.<sup>262</sup> Therefore, an illustration of the dynamics of implicature in a comparable situation in English can be useful in pointing us in the right direction in Hebrew.<sup>263</sup> Let us suppose that there are two individuals looking at a third who is located a sufficient distance away from them as to make visual identification difficult. One of the two individuals, let us say Mr. A, knows the identity of the distant person and the other, Mr. B, does not. Mr. B asks 'Who is that?' If Mr. A knows that Mr. B is previously familiar with that person, the appropriate response would be with the personal name, along with other information

---

order (i.e. 'Ephraim and Manasseh') rather than in correct birth order.

<sup>262</sup> I have in mind Paul Grice's cooperative principle and four maxims of conversation implicature. For a good discussion of the strengths and limitations of Grice's maxims, see Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 97-166. Very briefly, Grice's four maxims are: (1) the Maxim of Quality (be truthful); (2) the Maxim of Quantity (give as much information as is needed, but no more than is needed); (3) the Maxim of Relation (be relevant); and (4) the Maxim of Manner (ironically summarized as 'be perspicuous'; in other words, be concise, ordered, and clear).

<sup>263</sup> The primary operative maxim is the maxim of quantity, but one can also see the relevance of the maxims of relation and manner.

dictated by the context.<sup>264</sup> On the other hand, if Mr. A leaves out the personal name (or a personal pronoun), this implies a total lack of familiarity ('that is a man who helped me fix my car') or an impersonal familiarity (based on function, for example, as in 'that is the plumber'; note the presence of the definite article). Therefore, based on this (and assuming sufficient continuity between English and Biblical Hebrew with regard to conversational implicature), one would lean toward interpreting the lack of personal names in Joseph's response as connoting a lack of familiarity between the parties rather than familiarity.<sup>265</sup>

However, Jacob's poor vision is not the only operative condition in his question and in Joseph's answer. As already mentioned, one must consider the possibility of a ritual function in the exchange. If personal familiarity is presumed, the absence of a personal name in the answer may indicate that the situation is formal, that the statement has legal or religious conventional significance. It is common in ritual language, which is schematic, for personal names to be omitted, as in 'Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?'; in reference to an office, as in 'Long live the king'; perhaps also ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος from John 19.5.<sup>266</sup> Because the surrounding text does not overtly support a lack of familiarity between Jacob and Joseph's sons, the absence of personal names in Joseph's response points toward its ritual function.

---

<sup>264</sup> Or possibly with a personal pronoun, as when Americans will often say on the phone to their families 'It's me', presuming their voice to be recognisable. Personal names also tend to be used in formal and informal personal introductions ('This is my wife, Lara'). In such cases, a kind of conceptual familiarity may already exist, including merely familiarity with the one making the introduction.

<sup>265</sup> Admittedly, this hypothetical situation does not cover every possible situation. The purpose is simply to show linguistic tendencies.

<sup>266</sup> Hamilton (II, 634) also points to questions of identification in modern Christian ritual situations, such as 'What name is given to this child?' at baptism, or 'Who giveth this woman to this man?' addressed to the father of the bride at a wedding. One might also add that the standard responses to this latter question lack personal names, e.g. 'Her mother and I.'

The second remarkable feature of Joseph's response is its contrast with Jacob's and Esau's responses in the parallel moments in Genesis 27, both in form and in the kind of information it gives instead of personal names. In Hebrew verbless clauses, a distinction is generally made between an identifying function and a descriptive or classifying function.<sup>267</sup> According to Andersen, these functions tend toward certain kinds of sentence structures in the Pentateuch. Of most interest to our present study are his rules (1), (3) and (6).<sup>268</sup> According to rule (1), when a sentence is identifying (that is, both parts of the clause are similarly definite), the structure tends to be Subject-Predicate.<sup>269</sup> On the other hand, rule (3) observes that when a sentence is classifying (that is, the predicate is indefinite relative to the subject), the

---

<sup>267</sup> Joüon §154 *ea* uses the word 'description', whereas Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch*, JBL.MS, 14 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), p. 32, uses the word 'classification.' In both cases, the identifying function is understood as a total semantic overlap between subject and predicate, so that the definiteness of the predicate is important. Andersen likewise understands the 'classification' clause in terms of the indefiniteness of the predicate, so that there is only partial semantic overlap, or the amount of semantic overlap is unknown. Joüon and Muraoka note the insufficiency of Andersen's term and definition, especially to encompass existential or locative sentences, and expound the 'descriptive' function thus: 'the predicate describes the entity represented by the subject, to indicate in what state, condition or location the subject is found, or to what class or category it can be assigned.' See also Kirk E. Lowery, 'Relative Definiteness and the Verbless Clause', in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, ed. by Cynthia Lynn Miller, LSAWS, 1 (Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 251-272.

<sup>268</sup> Andersen, pp. 39-47.

<sup>269</sup> The issue of how to identify the subject in the sentence is problematic. Andersen's basic rule is that the word which contains the topic, or the old information, is the subject. This would be a personal pronoun, if present and not pleonastic (in which case a different rule would apply), since it would refer back to something in a previous sentence. The predicate will contain the comment, or new information. Lowery criticises this approach for its lack of formal criteria and because of what he perceives to be an overly simple approach to definiteness. But Andersen appears to be aware of the breadth of the overall problem of definiteness. He observes that the topic-comment criterion for distinguishing subject and predicate is especially apt when the verbless clause is answering a question (in other words, our cases in Gen 27.19, 32, 33.5 and 48.9 are as close to typical for Andersen as possible). Also, he accounts for vagueness in the definiteness of suffixed pronouns. Andersen, pp. 21, 46-47; Lowery, p. 259. While Lowery is right to seek greater clarification, Andersen's treatment is sufficient to analyse our verses.

structure tends toward Predicate-Subject. Rule (6) points out that a suffixed noun can be either definite or indefinite depending on the context.<sup>270</sup>

In Genesis 27.18–19 and 32, Isaac's poor eyesight is the central motivating factor behind his question *מי אתה בני* or *מי אתה*. This anticipates an answer whose function is identifying, not classifying (Isaac is wanting to know who, among a number of already known people, the person near him is). The answers given are *אנכי* *עשו בכרך* in 27.19 and *אני בכרך עשו* in 27.32.<sup>271</sup> The structure of these answers is Subject-Predicate, where the predicate includes the proper name Esau. Not only does the context dictate that the answer implied by the question will be an identifying one, the sentence structure of the answers is consistent with Andersen's rule (1).

On the other hand, in Genesis 48.9 Joseph responds to Jacob's question with *בני הם אשר נתן-לי אלהים בזה*, 'These are my sons whom God has given me in this place.'<sup>272</sup> The sentence structure is Predicate-Subject-Predicate.<sup>273</sup> The suffixed noun *בני* occupies a grey area as regards its definiteness, but according to Andersen's rule (6), the sentence structure nudges this sentence into the realm of classification rather

---

<sup>270</sup> Admittedly, Andersen's rules do not encompass all instances of the verbless clause in a truly satisfying way. An alternative approach which endeavours to summarise the Andersen's nine rules into one generative rule is suggested by Randall Buth, 'Word Order in the Verbless Clause: A Generative-Functional Approach', in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, ed. Cynthia Lynn Miller, LSAWS, 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 79-108. Once again, however, the situation in Gen 27.19, 32, 33.5 and 48.9 are especially appropriate for applying Andersen's research, so for the purposes of the present discussion it will suffice.

<sup>271</sup> The two responses are not identical. The placement of the name 'Esau' and the description are reversed, and one uses *אנכי* and the other *אני*. While the relationship between the two pronouns is commonly conceived evolutionarily (*אנכי* is the more primitive form, *אני* the later and ultimately dominant form; see Joüon §39 a), Cassuto (pp. 49-51) suggests that in nominal clauses *אנכי* serves to emphasize the subject and *אני* the object. If Cassuto is right, Jacob's answer could sound suspicious, and the implied reader may perceive it as part of what makes Isaac suspicious. Nevertheless, both are identifying rather than classifying sentences.

<sup>272</sup> This is the unmarked structure, not an emphatic structure. See Muraoka, *Emphatic*, p. 15. Joüon §154 fa says: 'A personal pronoun tends to occupy the second slot when no prominence is intended to be given to it.' Contrast with 27.19 and 32, where the pron. comes first, and where identification versus description is more important.

<sup>273</sup> Andersen's clause #142, also found in Lev 25.55 and Deut 21.20. Andersen, p. 66.

than identification. Joseph's answer assumes that Jacob wants or needs to know information about Manasseh and Ephraim, not simply that it is indeed Manasseh and Ephraim standing before him. This would suggest that Jacob's inability to see is not the central motivating factor to his question in 48.8.

The third noteworthy feature of Joseph's response is that it bears a strong resemblance to the answer Jacob gives to Esau's question **מי אלה לך** in 33.5.<sup>274</sup> The question implies a descriptive answer, both from its context and its form. Esau, unlike Isaac, can clearly see the subject of his question, but he does not know them since he has never before had the chance to meet them. Secondly, the question includes the word **לך**, shading the question towards the descriptive. A literal translation into English comes across harshly ('Who are these to you?'), but the word **לך** does seek specifically to know who these children are in relation to Jacob. The personal names are less important. That they are his children is of fundamental importance.

The two answers of 33.5 and 48.9 are not identical, however. There are important differences, as well. The answer in 33.5 is a sentence fragment that lacks an explicit subject (the subject is therefore implied to be the object of the preceding question). The answer in 48.9, on the other hand, begins with a complete nominal clause. The relative clauses that follow in both cases say something very similar (and both refer to **אלהים** rather than to **יהוה**) but they use different verbs (which affect the syntax: the speaker relates God's action to himself using **לי** in 48.9 versus **את-עבדך** in 33.5), and 48.9 includes the locative **בזה**. What could these differences mean? First of all, we are not dealing with a stock phrase, and this would appear at first glance to argue against interpreting 48.9 as ritual dialogue. Also, the context of 33.5, which

---

<sup>274</sup> As noted above, Sam. and Gr. both have **מי אלה לך** in 48.8, as well. My comments here assume the MT's reading, acknowledging that whichever reading may have been original cannot be decided with certainty.

bears resemblance to the events of 48.8–12 in more ways than one, is not that of a ritual. However, Joseph's descriptive answer is more replete with unnecessary or redundant information, and this would point to a kind of formality in 48.9 which is not present in 33.5. Jacob's answer to Esau identifies the subjects as his children only once ('the children which God has bestowed upon me'). Joseph's answer does so twice, through the word בני and by saying the clause 'which God has given to me.' Also, the locative בזה in 48.9 is, strictly speaking, unnecessary information (and a corollary is notably absent in 33.5).<sup>275</sup> Redundancies of this sort hint that the answer in 48.9 may be more ritually than merely pragmatically descriptive.

In summary, if 48.3–7 is indeed a historical prologue and part of a legal ritual form as one finds in Exodus 19 and Joshua 24, one would expect a confirming dialogue and action beginning in 48.8. The identification dialogue of 48.8–9 evidences a ritual function which is consistent with this expectation. Jacob's question מי אלה is motivated both by his poor eyesight (explained in verse 10) and by the ritual situation, but probably not by a lack of familiarity with Manasseh and Ephraim, since the presumed lack of familiarity has no support in the final form of the text.

---

<sup>275</sup> According to Lebram, *Pesiqta Rabbati* interprets בזה as a reference to Joseph's wife 'These are the sons which God has given me through this one.' This interpretation also appears to be behind *Targum Yerušalmi II*'s version of Gen 48.8. J. C. H. Lebram, 'Jakob segnet Josephs Söhne: Darstellungen von Genesis XLVIII in der Überlieferung und bei Rembrandt', in *The Priestly Code and Seven Other Studies*, OTS, 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 145–69 (pp. 159–60). This meaning is highly unlikely, however. Of the seventeen occurrences of בזה or ובה noted by Mandelkern in the Hebrew Bible, all twelve (not including 48.9) are clearly and exclusively spatial-proximal adverbs (Gen 38.21, 22; Exod 24.14; Num 22.19; 23.1, 29; Judg 18.3; I Sam 1.26; 9.11; 14.34; 21.10; II Sam 11.12). Esth 2.13 uses the word as a temporal conjunction/adverb. This leaves I Sam 16.8, 9 and Qoh 7.18, both of which use זה as a demonstrative pronoun (two personal, one impersonal) prefixed by the prep. ב to mark it as the object (both בחר and אחר commonly take prep. ב). These last three examples show that it is not impossible for 48.9 to be referring to a person, but another problem arises concerning this use of the prep. ב to identify the woman by whom a man fathered children. Instead of ב, one finds prep. ל (II Sam 3) or, more commonly, a different sentence structure altogether (e.g. Gen 36.4–5; 46.15, 18, 22, 25). The Sam. reading of Gen 4.1 may preserve an instrumental use of the prep. ב in the context of childbirth (depending on what the verse even means, though Sam. pushes the meaning toward 'with the help of', while MT אה is vague). Given this evidence, understanding the word as a spatial-proximal adverb is the best option.



The fact that Jacob is called Israel in 48.8 also supports seeing a ritual function in his question. Joseph's answer also points to this ritual function. First, the answer omits the personal names Manasseh and Ephraim. This sort of answer would tend to point either to a lack of familiarity between Jacob and his grandsons or to a ritual function in the answer. Joseph's answer, unlike Jacob's and Esau's answers in 27.19 and 32, are descriptive or classifying rather than identifying, so the operative context in 48.9 is not simply Jacob's poor eyesight. In this respect Joseph's answer is more like Jacob's answer to Esau in 33.5, but important differences in the context and phrasing of the two answers, including the fact that Joseph's answer contains redundancies, reveal that Joseph's answer, unlike Jacob's, has a ritual function.

#### 3.2.4.2 The Confirming Event (Genesis 48.9b–12)

As the confirming dialogues in Exodus 19.7–8 and Joshua 24.16–24 are followed by a confirming event,<sup>276</sup> so too the confirming identification dialogue of 48.8–9a is followed by a confirming action in 48.9b–12, a tangible expression of Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim. Joseph leads his two sons to Jacob so that he can kiss them and embrace them, after which Joseph removes them from Jacob's knees and bows to the ground. The elements in this section not only relate to other confirming events (indicating, once again, that what is being depicted is some kind of ritual), but the specific elements are conventional elements also found in other death-bed stories.

After the ritual identification, Jacob asks Joseph to bring the two young men near to him so that he can bless them.<sup>277</sup> One question here is what is the relationship

---

<sup>276</sup> The theophany at Sinai and the stone monument at Shechem, respectively. 1 Sam 12 also concludes with a theophanic storm that validates Samuel's indictment of the Israelites.

<sup>277</sup> Procksch (p. 424) offers a fascinating proposal that בֵּרַךְ in v. 9 may not mean 'to bless' but rather 'to take upon the knee' or 'to adopt.' If this could be verified it could solve some problems, but unfortunately lexicographical data does not support the proposal. Neither *HALOT* nor *DCH* show another use of either בֵּרַךְ (bless) or בָּרַךְ (to kneel) in the Hebrew Bible that could bear Procksch's

between Jacob's expressed intention ('that I may bless them') and the actions that follow, or where does the blessing actually occur? Clearly, verses 13–20 relate a blessing that parallels similar events in both chapters 27 and 49. But what is going on in verses 10–12? While some view verses 10–20 as either two blessings or two parts of a single blessing,<sup>278</sup> what actually occurs in verses 10–12 by themselves does not bear a strong enough resemblance to anything we would recognise as a death-bed blessing ritual.

Westermann observes a parallel form between 48.9b–12 and 27.1–40. In 48.9b–12 three of the five parts of the blessing ritual of chapter 27, as he identifies it, are present: (1) the demand of the father; (2) the identification; (4) the presentation and touch. Missing, he says, are (3) the offering of food and drink for the purpose of strengthening the one who blesses, and (5) the pronouncement of the blessing.<sup>279</sup> This would appear at first to demonstrate a strong resemblance between 48.9b–12 and a death-bed blessing ritual, but there are two problems with Westermann's assessment. First, his two missing elements are actually present in chapter 48, just not in verses 9b–12. If one extends one's scope to include all of chapter 48, the strengthening to sit

---

proposed meaning. If comparative Semitic data showed the presence of such a verb one could argue for a hapax legomenon בָּרַךְ 'adopt' (though the thematic significance of בָּרַךְ 'bless' in Genesis would still argue in favour of 'bless' in 48.9b). But while Akkadian and Ugaritic bear witness to the symbolic significance of the knee or lap in adoption circumstances, there is no evidence of a verb בָּרַךְ that means 'to take upon the knee' or 'to adopt.' Von Rad (p. 415) positively assesses Procksch's idea but does not depend on it. See also Davidson, p. 295, and the NEB translation. No one else appears to have followed Procksch in this.

<sup>278</sup> This appears to describe, at least partially, the view of Westermann, III, 210 (see his comment especially on v. 9b); Hamilton, II, 633–44. Cotter (p. 324) lumps vv. 8–22 together under the heading 'A blessing for Joseph's sons', though when he speaks of the blessing he describes only the events following v. 12. Wenham divides the chapter into scenes rather awkwardly (vv. 8–10, 11–20), but his interpretation of the events is comparable—prelude or introduction followed by the blessing as the core of the event. So also Driver, p. 377; Seebass, 'The Joseph Story', 29–43. Lowenthal (pp. 137–41) views the entire Episode as a series of attempts by Joseph to get Manasseh blessed as first-born. In v. 12 Joseph is essentially interrupting in order to correct an implied misunderstanding by Jacob. Everything after v. 7, however, is part of one process, according to Lowenthal.

<sup>279</sup> Westermann, III, 187.

up in verse 2 is clearly comparable with Westermann's third element, and what occurs in verses 13–20 is Westermann's missing fifth element. Why would Westermann miss so obvious a parallel? Once again this has to do with getting the methodological cart before the horse. Westermann's diachronic presuppositions about the shape of chapter 48, which include a division between verses 12 and 13, have limited his reading of the text's present form and sought plot-structures only in the text's earliest form.<sup>280</sup>

Second, it is questionable whether there is enough evidence in the Hebrew Bible to assert as narrowly defined a form for a 'blessing ritual' as Westermann has. There is a difference between finding evidence in the text of ritual language and activity on the one hand and defining a ritual from that text on the other. The pattern he identifies is found nowhere outside of Genesis 27 and 48. What he has effectively identified are two things: (1) literary parallels (probably intentional) between the two death-bed stories, and (2) some elements which form a part of the larger set of conventions of the death-bed type-scene.

Therefore, we have no other textual justification for seeing the events of 48.9b–12 as a blessing ritual, or at least as a complete one. This undermines some of the evidence for diachronic development in chapter 48.<sup>281</sup> If verses 13–20 are not an alternate account of the blessing that is more concerned with the precedence of Ephraim over Manasseh, in other words a doublet with verses 8–12, but rather the enactment of אֲבִירָם in verse 9b, then two questions remain: (1) what is going on in verses 8–12, and (2) why are Ephraim and Manasseh presented to Jacob twice? The answer to the second question is tied to that of the first.

---

<sup>280</sup> Westermann, III, 188. Westermann's view is that vv. 13-20 were appended to vv. 1-2, 8-12 (prior to the inclusion of vv. 3-7) as an expansion of v. 9b. See also Coats, *Genesis*, pp. 303-7.

<sup>281</sup> Carr, 255 (n. 67); Blum, pp. 250-54, 259.

If 48.8–12 is not a blessing ritual, what is it? It is a confirming ritual event for the adoption proceedings which have been going on since at least verse 3.<sup>282</sup> While we do not have enough evidence to define a ‘typical’ adoption ritual, what we can do is identify characteristics of ritual activity to see if this interpretation offers a more satisfying picture of what we observe in verses 8–12.

When Joseph presents his sons in verse 10, Jacob kisses them and embraces them. One can easily see what Westermann has pointed out: that the kiss and embrace are features of the story that parallel Genesis 27.22, 27.<sup>283</sup> But it is important to realise that this motif is not unique to these two stories; it is also typical of other death-bed stories.<sup>284</sup> This fact urges against seeing one as the standard form and the other as the deviation from the norm. Both appear to be creative implementations of a common convention, so the two stories can mutually interpret one another.

While a kiss/touch occurs in both Genesis 27 and 48, the purpose behind this action (just as with the question of identity) is different in the two stories. In chapter 27, Isaac first touches Jacob to try and verify his identity (since he suspects something is awry). Then he uses the kiss as a sneaky way to try and verify Jacob’s identity through his sense of smell (an eventuality that Rebekah has foreseen in dressing Jacob in Esau’s garment). It is possible that these actions are depicted as

---

<sup>282</sup> Waltke (p. 594-955) also divides the text in essentially this way and with this understanding of a distinction between the adoption and blessing rituals.

<sup>283</sup> Westermann, III, 187.

<sup>284</sup> *T. Reu.* 1.5; *T. Sim.* 1.2; *T. Dan* 7.1 (in the Epilogue); *T. Benj.* 1.2; also recollected about Jacob and Joseph’s interactions at Jacob’s death-bed in *T. Benj.* 3.7. Sarna (p. 327) sees the kissing and embracing here and elsewhere in Genesis as features of ritual. As a type-scene motif, it is worth noting that the motif’s location and purpose shifts within the death-bed type-scene. In Gen 27, *T. Reu.*, *T. Sim.*, and *T. Benj.* it occurs just prior to the pronouncement of the Testament. In *T. Dan* it occurs after the Testament has been given, just prior to death. In Gen 48.10 it is the confirming event of the adoption ritual. One should probably also consider Gen 50.1 an example of the motif that occurs after the death of the main character. Hamilton (II, 634-35 (n. 26)) also notes that ‘embrace’ and ‘kiss’ are a conventional pair not only in Hebrew literature but in Ugaritic literature, as well.

parts of a ritual in Genesis 27,<sup>285</sup> but the narrator's interest in these actions has surpassed a merely ritual level. Ritual tends to be concerned at least as much with form as with content, if not more so.<sup>286</sup> But in Genesis 27, the question of identity is a very real and critical one, so any formal significance of the embrace is secondary. In Genesis 48 there is never any doubt expressed by Jacob as to the veracity of the identity of Joseph's sons, so the narrator's interest in the actions is more transparent. They are expressions of affection first of all (and this is consistent with the convention's occurrences in other death-bed stories), but their context suggests a ritual significance overlaying this display of affection.<sup>287</sup>

Are the kiss and embrace sufficient in themselves to indicate adoption? No, but the context of those actions may indicate something more. By implication, Manasseh and Ephraim are *עם ברכיו* or 'with/at his knees' when the kiss and embrace occur. The knees are a space symbolic of close identification.<sup>288</sup> As Staal notes, in cases where a particular kind of action (like lighting a fire) appears in both ordinary and ritual contexts, what distinguishes the ritual act is that it is governed by rules so

---

<sup>285</sup> Although to say this for certain would depend on a level of knowledge of the implied audience which is virtually impossible to attain without more textual or historical evidence.

<sup>286</sup> Staal ('Meaninglessness', 2-22), perhaps, overstates the case, especially in light of the fact that elements of rituals can sometimes be improvised to fit a given situation (see below). Nevertheless, his essential point, emphasizing form over content, has great explanatory power. See also Bell, pp. 68-72, 139-44; Winn, 'Legal Ritual', 207-32.

<sup>287</sup> Sarna, p. 327; Waltke, p. 598.

<sup>288</sup> And therefore, by extension (but only by extension and only potentially), of adoption. Waltke, p. 598; Wenham, II, 464; H. F. Richter, "'Auf den Knien eines anderen gebären'"? (Zur Deutung von Gen 30,3 und 50,23)', *ZAW*, 91 (1979), 436-437; Sarna, p. 327; Wilson, p. 198. While Akkadian *birkum* and *burku* are not used in adoption contexts, they are used metaphorically of a parental or guardianship relationship. See *CAD*, II, 256. In Ugaritic, the verb *brk* (I), 'to kneel', can function as a euphemism for childbirth. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. by Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 67, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), II, p. 237. The symbolic power is in the knees of the adopter as a thematized space, not so much in the posture of the adoptee. Therefore, Stade's observation (143-56 (p. 144)) that the text has *מעם* rather than *מעל* is only significant insofar as it supports a reading of this scene where Joseph's sons are too big, or Jacob too weak, for them to actually sit on his lap. The mention of knees would be totally unnecessary if it were true both that they were not sitting on them and that the knees had no symbolic power.

that its form is fixed. The effect of lighting a fire within a ritual is not the primary concern. That it was lit in the proper sequence with the proper tools by the proper person in the proper place—this is what makes it efficacious as a ritual and not the end result nor the intentions or mental state of the participants at the time of the ritual.<sup>289</sup> The fact that these actions are taking place within the symbolic space around Jacob's knees are not conclusive evidence of ritual, but one of the ways an ordinary action might be used as a ritual is by performing it according to certain rules, like performance in a particular space. When seen in light of the evidence from the surrounding text (whereby we are expecting a confirming event), a ritual interpretation of the kiss and embrace of 48.10 is clearly plausible.

Kissing one's grandchildren occurs also at the end of Genesis 31, which is another legal context that establishes the boundaries between the Israelites and the Aramaeans. Much of the chapter can be usefully analysed as a standard legal ritual (indictments; historical reviews; an agreement confirmed by an event—the setting up of a monument). What is of interest at this point is Laban's claim of ownership over Jacob's sons in verse 43 (והבנים בני)—a claim he never completely relinquishes as his right—and the fact that the chapter ends with him kissing his grandsons (called בנים) and daughters and blessing them (ברך). The connection of the claim and the kiss may be significant, even though the results of chapters 31 and 48 are very different.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>289</sup> Staal, 'Meaninglessness', 2-22. Von Rad (p. 415) observes: '[The ancient Israelites] believed that by definite rites and gestures a blessing could be effectively and irrevocably bestowed upon another. The narratives about blessings are therefore extremely interested in ... the words of the blessing themselves. But just as important for them is the external event, i.e., the way in which the blessing was given.' What von Rad describes is not merely an Israelite belief nor even simply an ancient belief. Moderns engage in ritual in very much the same way. See Winn, 'Legal Ritual', 207-32 (pp. 213-14).

<sup>290</sup> Wenham, II, 281; Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 248-51; Matthews, II, 534. It is interesting that Laban's stipulation in v. 50, concerning the proper treatment of his daughters and a prohibition against taking more wives, reflects language typical of marriage contracts, even though the subject of the legal event is not marriage. If Speiser is right that an underlying legal reality in the story is that possession of Laban's teraphim gives Jacob legal status as Laban's adopted son and heir, the whole context begins to look like a number of Akkadian language combination marriage-and-adoption contracts, such as HSS V, no. 67. The prohibition against taking further wives is a way of insuring that what Jacob has

The speech of 48.11 fits in with the ritual model, as well. Depending on the ritual, there are often portions of a ritual that can be improvised or modified extemporaneously.<sup>291</sup> These portions customise the ritual for a given occasion. Joshua 24, which parallels 48.1–12 as a general legal form, contains one last piece of dialogue from Joshua after the confirming event and before the conclusion of the covenant ritual (verse 27). What is said in these cases is not so important as that something is said, but in both cases the statement reflects somehow on the significance of what has just happened in the confirming event.

The content of the improvised portion of the ritual is Jacob's celebration over seeing his grandsons. To see one's descendants is a blessing in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East (and, indeed, throughout human literature and culture). It is one of the primary factors differentiating good and bad deaths in Hebrew narrative. To have or see no children is very unfortunate in itself, but even worse are situations where a character lives to see his or her own children die.<sup>292</sup> The blessing of descendants appears to increase in value for each generation seen, to the point that 'seeing' one's descendants to the fourth generation became a conventional motif for the ideal.<sup>293</sup>

---

received from Laban as his de facto heir does not benefit any children not directly connected to him.

<sup>291</sup> Bell, pp. 142–43. Against rigidly formal understandings of ritual behaviour (as represented especially by Staal), Turner argues that, rather than a set of 'rules', the forms of ritual activity are schemas, which he defines as, 'a generalized form of activity built up from practice, that remains open to inductive inputs from the activities it guides. It thus contains a degree of indeterminacy, and remains capable of variation and improvisation.' Terence Turner, 'Structure, Process, Form', in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 207–46 (p. 223). This feature recalls the way modern attorneys may use a standard form and fill in the blanks, so to speak, for new occasions. Winn, 207–32 (p. 217). There may be grounds for distinguishing between religious and legal rituals on this point. See Burkhard Gladigow, 'Complexity', in *Theorizing Rituals*, pp. 483–94 (pp. 488–89).

<sup>292</sup> Ruth 1.20; I Sam 4.17–18; 31.1–13; II Kgs 25.7.

<sup>293</sup> Job 42.16; see also the Babylonian memorial inscription, A. L. Oppenheim, trans., 'The Mother of Nabonidus', in *ANET*, pp. 560–62 (p. 561): 'I saw my great-great-grandchildren, up to the fourth generation, in good health and (thus) had my fill of old age.'

After Jacob celebrates seeing his grandsons, Joseph removes them from near Jacob's knees and bows to Jacob. These two actions bring the events of verses 8–12 to a kind of conclusion.<sup>294</sup> Intentional and organic final form coherence can be clearly seen in the necessary plot connections between 48.1–12 and 47.31. As observed earlier, in 47.31 Jacob bows in gratitude to Joseph in what must be understood as a fulfilment of Genesis 37.9–11. Jacob is indebted to Joseph, who is the only one with the authority to execute Jacob's burial request. This action seems to leave an imbalance in the death-bed story: the son is left in a position superior to the father. But the bowing of Joseph in verse 12 and his subsequent powerlessness to make Jacob bless his sons the way he wants him to shift the balance back to the father.<sup>295</sup> Perhaps Genesis 48 could exist without 47.28–31, but if the death-bed type-scene is, in fact, the stereotypical good death of Hebrew narrative, it would be appropriate for Jacob's social status, authority, and honour to be reaffirmed in his death. Genesis 47.31 anticipates 48.12 and needs it for balance. Additionally, this element in 47.31 also ties in to 48.2.

47.31 וישתחו ישראל על-ראש המטה—Israel bowed on the top/head of the bed.

48.2 ויאחזק ישראל וישב על-המטה—Israel strengthened himself and sat upon the bed.

The Hebrew sentences bear a stronger resemblance to each other than do their English counterparts. It seems very likely that the reader should hear an echo tying

---

<sup>294</sup> Waltke, p. 598. Seebaß (29-43 (p. 30)) characterizes this verse more as a moment of tension and transition than as conclusion. This is partly because Seebass is using the word 'conclusion' more strongly than I am, and partly because Seebass understands vv. 8-12 more as a formal introduction of the boys rather than as a legal process with its own telos. However, Seebass's reading of the narrative function of Joseph's bowing in Gen 48 compares very closely with my assessment of that of Bathsheba's bowing in 1 Kgs 1: transition and anticipation.

<sup>295</sup> Seebaß (29-43 (p. 30)) observes, 'The prostration of Joseph in front of his father makes it clear that Joseph accepts him as the head of the family in spite of his own superior power.' See also Matthews, II, 878; Waltke, p. 598. Even if it rebalances authority or honour, it is not shameful to Joseph, as in Turner, *Announcements*, pp. 163, 166. McGuire's perspective (p. 18) is better: 'The hero's splendid elevation is achieved by virtue of his obedient service in the world governed by the God of his fathers, and is ritually completed in the respectful compliance and self-effacement symbolized in bowing low before the father for whom Elohim (God) is Lord.'



the two scenes together, and this, then, is an excellent example of the work of the final hand in shaping his materials.<sup>296</sup>

Joseph's bowing is paralleled in 1 Kings 1.31. Both 1 Kings 1 and Genesis 48 concern the Selection of the Worthy Successor, and in both contexts the Worthy Successors are represented by an Agent: Joseph in Genesis 48 and Bathsheba in 1 Kings 1. After Bathsheba has approached David and secured his promise to make Solomon his Successor, but before David actually begins giving commands that insure this decision, Bathsheba bows to David in gratitude. This bowing marks a turning point in the story. The same is true in Genesis 48. What has happened prior to Joseph's bow before Jacob is that Manasseh and Ephraim have been selected as Worthy Successors to Jacob. In response to this selection Joseph bows in gratitude.<sup>297</sup> What happens afterwards is based upon that selection.

Why was an adoption ritual performed before the blessing ritual? Adoption was primarily a method of estate planning in the ancient Near East.<sup>298</sup> Nowhere else in Hebrew narrative do we see a grandfather blessing or passing on an inheritance directly to grandsons. The Ugaritic case noted by Mendelsohn may point to an ancient Near Eastern legal custom wherein only those identified as sons and not grandsons could inherit directly.<sup>299</sup> In this case, the adoption of the boys would be the

---

<sup>296</sup> Donner, *Gestalt*, p. 34; Blum, p. 253.

<sup>297</sup> MT reading is preferable to plural found in Gr. and elsewhere. The action of Joseph as Agent is parallel to Bathsheba, and the boys are otherwise passive in the scene. Both features predict Joseph bowing to Jacob, not the boys. However, the ritual nature of the action is the same either way.

<sup>298</sup> While one is hard-pressed to find examples of prescriptive law describing the procedures of adoption, the importance of the legal fiction of adoption is born witness by the large number of adoption contracts surviving from all across the ancient Near East. Isaac Mendelsohn, 'A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh', *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 180–83; Speiser, 'Kirkuk', 1–73. Admittedly, the quantity of contracts from Nuzi is likely related to the particulars of Nuzi law that necessitated adoption for certain kinds of real estate sales. See section 3.2.4.3 below.

<sup>299</sup> Mendelsohn, 'A Ugaritic Parallel', 180–3. On the other hand, the case in the Ugaritic text may be motivated by the fact that the adoptee is the son of the grandfather's daughter and not of his son, although daughters did have certain inheritance rights in some parts of the ancient Near East.

necessary legal prerequisite of the blessing of verses 13–20—without it the blessing would have been illegitimate. This also explains why Jacob would say in 48.9b ‘Bring them to me that I may bless them.’ Jacob is looking ahead to his ultimate intention of blessing them as full heirs.<sup>300</sup> The adoption ritual permits him to do so.

One final note: the two actions obviously cannot be completely separated from one another. The actual blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh includes some performative language pertaining to their adoption as full heirs (48.16—‘In them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac’). The point is that the ritual of 48.8–12 is an adoption ritual, and the ritual of 48.13–20 is a blessing ritual.<sup>301</sup> Adoption is assumed, not enacted, in the blessing.

In summary, 48.9b–12 is a confirming event for the adoption ritual of 48.3–12. The mention of blessing in verse 9b does not refer to what comes immediately after but ultimately to verses 13–20. The kiss and embrace are conventional elements of the death-bed type-scene. The embrace of chapter 27 differs in purpose from that of chapter 48, though the two events may point to a ritual that is creatively implemented in two different ways. The fact that the kiss and embrace in chapter 48 happen in the symbolic space of Jacob’s knees points to an

---

<sup>300</sup> Several commentators have understood the most natural referent of ‘bless’ in v. 9b to be what happened after v. 12, but the tendency has been to deal with this through diachronic speculation. Gunkel (pp. 424, 427–28) for example, assigns vv. 9b–10a, 13–14 and 17–20a to J, and vv. 8–9a, 10b–12 and 15–16 to E. Westermann (III, 210–11) considers v. 9b to be part of the motivation for the appendage of vv. 13–20, but he understands vv. 10–12 to narrate a blessing. De Hoop (pp. 478–79), like Westermann, sees the two passages as originally alternate accounts of Jacob’s encounter with Joseph’s sons, but unlike Westermann he does not interpret the kiss and embrace as the actual blessing and believes that the **וַאֲבֵרַכֵם** ‘that I may bless them’ was added as preparation for vv. 13–20. De Hoop’s synchronic reading of the passage provides so plausible an explanation for the referent of **וַאֲבֵרַכֵם**, and one that so seamlessly integrates the two halves of the story, that one wonders why his diachronic reading insists on seeing 13–20 as an originally separate story. Without the surface level tensions and seams, the rationale for a diachronic distinction here disappears and so must be presupposed.

<sup>301</sup> Sarna (pp. 325–28) and Matthews (II, 873–78) understand the text essentially in this way. Wenham (II, 464) says something similar when commenting on v. 13: ‘Ephraim and Manasseh, having been introduced to their grandfather, are now positioned by Joseph to receive the appropriate blessing.’ So also Hamilton, II, 635; Waltke, pp. 598. More specifically, however, I assert that vv. 8–12 form the legal foundation for the blessing of vv. 13–20, not just a formal introduction.

adoptive significance. Genesis 31 also shows a connection between the claim of a grandfather to possession of his grandsons and his kissing them. The speech of verse 11 fits the ritual model of Joshua 24. The bowing action of Joseph in verse 12 is similar to the bowing of Bathsheba (another Agent of a Worthy Successor) in 1 Kings 1.31. Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim, rather than being a parallel blessing account, appears to be a legal prerequisite for a valid blessing.

### 3.2.4.3 Adoption in Ancient Israel

There is some debate as to whether or not one is justified in talking about 'adoption' in relation to the Hebrew Bible. While a majority of scholars accept or presume adoption to have taken place in ancient Israel, a significant minority has challenged this presumption. Foremost among these is Herbert Donner, who in his 1969 article objects to the use of the term 'adoption' in relation to the Hebrew Bible, in large part because its legal corpus says nothing about adoption. He furthermore argued, based on comparison with ancient Near Eastern legal documents, that the term 'adoption' should only be used to denote 'was "Adoption" im strengen Sinne des Wortes ist: die "Annahme an Kindesstatt" gewaltunterworfenen Personen mit ihren Rechtsfolgen.' In other words, the only thing that is truly 'adoption' in the ancient Near East is when a person takes another person of lower social status into sonship<sup>302</sup> (even the adoption of someone of equal social status, apparently like the so-called sale adoptions of Nuzi, should not be considered adoption).<sup>303</sup> These two objections to the use of the

---

<sup>302</sup> Women and girls were adopted, as well, so 'sonship' is not an ideal term. I cannot, however, think of an appropriate gender-neutral term ('child-ship' is extremely awkward, and 'childhood' means something else, entirely). 'Sonship' translates Akkadian *mārūtum* literally, and the Akkadian term is applied to adoptions of both men and women.

<sup>303</sup> H. Donner, 'Adoption oder Legitimation? Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament auf dem Hintergrund der altorientalischen Rechte', *OrAnt*, 8 (1969), 87–119. See also Hans Jochen Boecker, 'Anmerkungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament', *ZAW*, 86 (1974), 86–89, who agrees with this restriction but identifies examples of adoption language in II Sam 7.14 and Ps 2.7.

term ‘adoption’, one in critique of scholarly usage and the other based on a dearth of biblical evidence, must each be treated.

Donner has much to say, most of it justified, concerning the irresponsible way scholars have tended to use the legal term ‘adoption’ in relation to biblical texts.<sup>304</sup> While he is certainly right to correct too broad of a use of the legal fiction of adoption, he overly restricts its application, especially when he makes social status a criterion. We can only call ‘adoption’ what the relevant documents call adoption. In most cases, these documents are mostly Akkadian language contracts headed by *tuppi mārūti ša PN* or *PN ana mārūti ipuš/ūtepuš* (*mārūtum* means ‘sonship’ and would be the closest Akkadian word to English/German ‘adoption’).<sup>305</sup> In some of these documents, while the social status of the persons involved is not spelled out, the adopter and the adoptee would appear to be of essentially the same social status (excepting the probable age difference). The adoption/marriage contract HSS v, no. 67 is a prime example where the one being adopted, Shennima, is the nephew of the adopter, Shurihilu. Furthermore, it appears to be especially Shurihilu’s needs that are being met by the adoption—Shennima is his backup plan since he has no sons to inherit his estate, only a daughter.

---

<sup>304</sup> Many commentators, like Wenham (II, 464) do not make a distinction between legitimation, or recognition, and adoption. This is the sort of terminological looseness which Donner was attempting to address, and which indeed is problematic when dealing with Genesis, a document that evidences a concern for legal categories and precision. In ancient Near Eastern legal texts, Donner is correct that legitimation and adoption are mostly distinct categories.

<sup>305</sup> Even the distinction made by Speiser and others between so-called ‘real’ adoptions and ‘sale’ adoptions at Nuzi is not advisable. This distinction, which is more a distinction between two kinds of motives rather than between two kinds of legal institutions, is based on the lack of filial responsibilities of the adoptee mentioned in the contract and the usually limited nature of the property to be transferred in the so-called ‘sale’ adoptions. Both kinds of adoptions, however, appear to have been viewed identically under the law (hence the effectiveness of the so-called ‘sale’ adoptions). Therefore, since we are in no position to be discerning the motives of the people involved in each contract, we should not be making a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘sale’ adoptions, but between those that acquire a principle heir for the adopter and those that do not. Both are ‘real’ adoptions. Speiser, ‘Kirkuk’, 1–73 (pp. 7–18). Mendelsohn (‘A Ugaritic Parallel’, 180–83) also points out that a Ugaritic adoption record wherein a grandfather adopts his daughter’s son lacks a filial requirement clause.

When speaking of ancient Near Eastern adoption, the best practise is to use this term to refer to the general phenomenon of kinship relationships (including sibling relationships) established by legal fiction for the ultimate purpose of estate planning.<sup>306</sup> Therefore, the comparative social status of the adopter and adoptee should have no relevance other than to observe that, in general, where there is a difference in social status, the one of higher social status adopts the one of lower social status, but this would seem self-evident. Regardless of what the motivation was behind some of the adoptions at Nuzi, certain features of the local inheritance laws or customs made it necessary to adopt the buyer of property in many cases. The lack of filial obligations to the adoptive parent does not change the fact that, in the eyes of the law, this was a legal fictive *mārūtum*, in no way distinguishable in the language of law from a *mārūtum* with filial obligation.

With regard to the use of ‘adoption’ by biblical scholars, however, I share Donner’s concern. Specifically, I agree that Genesis 30.3 and 50.23 cannot be considered references to adoption, even though these two verses are routinely regarded as such by commentators because of the ‘born upon the knee’ idiom.<sup>307</sup> Concerning Jacob’s adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim, Donner likewise blames the perception of it on the knee imagery: ‘Die Auffassung, es handle sich um die Adoption Manasses und Ephraims durch Jakob, stützt sich vor allem auf 48.12: ‘Da führte sie Joseph von seinen (scil. Jakobs) Knieen hinweg und verneigte sich tief zur Erde.’<sup>308</sup> This is not entirely accurate, though. While Donner is correct that scholars often refer to the knee imagery as indicative of adoption, the most important piece of evidence for seeing the whole scene as an adoption, that is, as the initiation of a legal fiction

---

<sup>306</sup> Donner is correct that *Pflegschaftsverhältnisse* or fostering relationships (the care of orphans) are not automatically adoptive relationships, but the same is true in modern legal situations. A fostering relationship that turns into an inheritance-related one, however, is an adoption, then as well as now.

<sup>307</sup> See section 6.5.1.1 on the meaning of ילדו על־ברכי.

<sup>308</sup> Donner, ‘Adoption’, 87-119 (p. 107).

whereby Manasseh and Ephraim are to be considered Jacob's sons for inheritance purposes, is found in verse 5: 'And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt, they are mine. Ephraim and Manasseh shall be to me like Reuben and Simeon.'<sup>309</sup>

Donner denies that this identity language ('They are mine' or 'You are my son', as in Psalm 2.7) reflects specialized adoption ritual language. The existence of such statements, according to Donner, is only supported obliquely by the assumption that such negative statements as occur in the revocation clauses of adoption contracts ('If [adopted individual] says to [adopting parents] "you are not my father" or "you are not my mother" ...') imply the existence of counterpart positive statements at the initiation of an adoption.<sup>310</sup>

If this were the only evidence, Donner would be quite right, but the use of positive identity-creating performative statements is borne witness to in at least two ancient Near Eastern legal codes. In the Code of Hammurabi §§170–71, the inheritance rights of the children of an *amtum* is dependent on whether or not the father ever says to those children, 'My children.' It is not entirely clear whether this declaration is supposed to have taken place in a formal setting or as an inadvertent slip of the tongue, but in either case the declaration is what establishes the full parent-heir relationship.<sup>311</sup> Tablet A of the Middle Assyrian Laws, §41, shows more clearly a ceremonial setting for this kind of language: 'If a seignior wishes to veil his concubine, he shall have five (or) six of his neighbors present (and) veil her in their presence (and) say, "She is my wife," (and so) she becomes his wife.'<sup>312</sup> Without this

---

<sup>309</sup> So also Blum, p. 252 (n. 50).

<sup>310</sup> Donner, 'Adoption', 87-119 (p. 114). In the cases of Ps 2.7 and II Sam 7.14, Boecker ('Anmerkungen', 86-89) disagrees and argues that the only way these statements can be understood is as adoptionistic language.

<sup>311</sup> Theophile J. Meek, tran., 'The Code of Hammurabi', in *ANET*, pp. 163–80.

<sup>312</sup> Theophile J. Meek, tran., 'The Middle Assyrian Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 180–88 (p. 183).

ceremony and this declaration, the law goes on to say, the concubine has not become the man's wife. Fifth century BCE Egyptian Aramaic marriage contracts also show the use of identity-creating language.<sup>313</sup> Admittedly, none of these instances concern adoption, but they do show the use of affirmatively-phrased performatives in the creation of legal-fictive identities.

Donner would prefer to consider Genesis 48 an example of *familienrechtliche Anerkennungsakte*, which both he and Boecker argue should not be subsumed under the heading 'adoption.' Presumably these include situations like those referred to in §170–171 of the Code of Hammurabi. As mentioned above, it is not clear what exactly is the context of the father's declaration 'My children.' Whatever the case, however, the essential nature of the relationship between father and children is not so much changed by a legal fiction as recognized, and I have to agree with Donner and Boecker that this should not be considered an adoption scenario.<sup>314</sup> But Donner goes on to classify Genesis 48 as this sort of recognition or legitimation scenario. The comparison depends on the presumptions that (1) Ephraim and Manasseh were naturally going to receive a share each of Jacob's inheritance, but (2) there may have been some legal reason others would exclude Joseph's sons from inheritance (commentators generally point to the Egyptian ethnicity of their mother).<sup>315</sup> Only

---

<sup>313</sup> COS, III, 3.63, 3.71.

<sup>314</sup> This is wrongly stated to be a 'verbal adoption' by Waltke, p. 596. Waltke's essential point, that that intrafamilial adoptions were known in the ancient Near East, is correct, as is his understanding that Code of Hammurabi §170 bears witness to a positive identification statement that confirms and makes fully legal an existing relationship. It is, however, inaccurate to refer to this situation as an adoption.

<sup>315</sup> Rashi, p. 240; Janzen, p. 184; Cotter, p. 324; Arnold, p. 374. Greifhagen examines the depiction of Egypt in the Pentateuch and concludes that the rhetorically dominant viewpoint is very negative. He does, however, note a voice preserved in the Pentateuch, especially in the Joseph narrative, that sees Egypt positively, as a place of refuge and prosperity. F. V. Greifhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity*, JSOTSup, 361 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 260–63. While Greifhagen's study is very interesting and appears sound, I must stress that the use of a nation or land thematically in narrative does not necessarily translate over into the narrator's or the implied reader's attitude toward Egyptian ethnicity. The taboo against exogamy is specifically concerned with Canaanites, and this because they are Israel's chief rivals for the land. Despite this fact, even though Judah's sons by Shua, a Canaanite (ch. 38), are never officially

with these two presuppositions does a recognition or legitimation scenario make sense.

Both presuppositions are faulty, however. First, though Joseph is the favoured son, at no point has he been officially designated the first-born so that he would receive two shares (indeed, the question of who would be the first-born seems to be a common theme connecting the Jacob cycle and the Joseph story). Secondly, we have no evidence that objections based on the ethnicity of the mother would require legitimation by the grandfather.<sup>316</sup> Indeed, even in the above excerpt from the Code of Hammurabi, the detail on which hinges the question of the children's right to inherit is not the ethnicity of the mother but her status as *amtum* rather than *hūrtum* (a specialized term for a full wife, or wife of similar social class to the husband—in marriage contracts usually just called an *aššatum*). Joseph's wife, being the daughter of a priest, certainly was not the Egyptian equivalent of an *amtum*, so at least according to Mesopotamian law Joseph's sons had no need of legitimation. Even if they had, it would have been Joseph who legitimated them, not the grandfather, and for the purpose of their receiving inheritance from Joseph, not Jacob. In this case I cannot agree that this is simply an act of recognition or legitimation. This is, in fact, an instance of adoption, because of its impact upon inheritance distribution.<sup>317</sup>

---

recognized by Jacob their right to inherit alongside the other grandchildren is never questioned, and other parts of Gen 37-50 are pro-Judah, including parts of the Jacob's death-bed story. Furthermore, it is conspicuous, and inconvenient for those wanting to tie Jacob's motivation for adoption to Asenath's ethnicity, that the most positive view of Egypt, according to Greifhagen, is found in the Joseph story. Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh is more about finding a wily way to give Joseph the double portion.

<sup>316</sup> See again section 6.5.1.1.

<sup>317</sup> As Mendelsohn ('A Ugaritic Parallel', 180-83) has shown, the adoption of a grandson by a grandfather is attested in Ugarit. While de Vaux calls instances like Gen 48 'adoption', his contention that in-family adoptions were 'not adoptions in the full sense' whose legal consequences were 'therefore not far-reaching' simply ignores a good deal of evidence (specifically from Ugarit and Nuzi) that in-family adoptions were common and important. There is no legal distinction in the contracts between these cases and adoptions from outside the immediate family. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. by John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), p. 51.



As to Donner's other charge, that the OT legal corpus says nothing about adoption, this is inconclusive: neither do the Laws of Ur-Nammu<sup>318</sup>, the Lipit-Ishtar law code,<sup>319</sup> the Laws of Eshnunna,<sup>320</sup> the Code of Hammurabi, the Middle Assyrian Laws, the Hittite Laws,<sup>321</sup> or the Neo-Babylonian Laws.<sup>322</sup> In fact, if we were to anticipate the role adoption played in the ancient Near East based upon the evidence in the prescriptive legal codes, we would have to conclude that it played virtually no role at all. Yet we know based on surviving contracts that it played a huge role. The legal fiction of adoption was, in fact, the primary method of estate planning, and there were commonly known many different kinds of adoption than are even practised today (such as adoption as siblings). Based upon the criterion mentioned above, even the existence, or at least the importance, of the institution of marriage among the Israelites would have to be called into question, since while some ancient Near Eastern legal codes prescribe some of the conditions of marriage contracts, the Hebrew Bible legal corpus has comparatively little in this regard. It presumes the existence of legal customs relating to marriage more than it prescribes them.

The problem here is that scholars have been looking at the wrong kind of legal documents. There are hypothetically three basic categories of legal document

---

<sup>318</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, 'The Laws of Ur-Nammu', *JCS*, 22 (1968), 66–82.

<sup>319</sup> S. N. Kramer, tran., 'Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode', in *ANET*, pp. 159–61.

<sup>320</sup> Albrecht Goetze, tran., 'The Laws of Eshnunna', in *ANET*, pp. 161–63. Reuven Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 2nd rev. edn (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988), p. 86, observes:

Another matter of interest, which emerges at once on perusal of the [Laws of Eshnunna], is the lack of any desire for comprehensiveness. Important spheres of the law, e.g., lease, partnership, adoption, succession, are not at all considered. More significant is another fact: even where a particular topic is considered in some detail, in a number of sections, attention is often devoted primarily to isolated, marginal questions. The emphasis is on the exceptional, and no attempt is made to provide comprehensive solutions for the variety of problems which might be envisaged as arising in a particular context. A knowledge of basic rulings is presupposed, hence no need is felt to set them out explicitly.

<sup>321</sup> Albrecht Goetze, tran., 'The Hittite Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 188–97.

<sup>322</sup> Theophile J. Meek, tran., 'The Neo-Babylonian Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 197–98.

we would have to consider. The first are prescriptive legal codes, like the Code of Hammurabi. The second are descriptions of legal procedure. Legal procedures are the speech-acts and rituals used by convention in a juridical setting to enact legal fictions or decisions. We can find descriptions of legal procedures in prescriptive law codes and in contracts (also in other kinds of documents, like narratives), but these are nowhere comprehensively written down, at least not that we have been able to discover. The third kind of legal document are contracts, which record the results of legal procedures as well as some hints as to the contents of those legal procedures.

Adoption is only known from contracts, but this evidence is more than sufficient to establish its importance in the ancient Near Eastern legal environment. We do not have libraries of contracts from ancient Israel as we do from ancient Mesopotamian and Hittite cities. This does not necessarily mean that they did not exist. It could simply mean that whatever might have existed either no longer does or has not been discovered. Furthermore, the law code preserved in the Pentateuch, like other ancient Near Eastern law codes, is not concerned with being comprehensive, but rather tends to concern itself with exceptional cases (at least where criminal and civil law are concerned—the cultic regulations found in the Torah are not a common feature of ancient Near Eastern law codes, an indication that perhaps OT law is not entirely of the same genre). Therefore, we have no grounds for declaring that ancient Israel knew nothing of adoption, especially in light of the institution's importance virtually everywhere else in the ancient world. Jacob's actions in Genesis 48.3–12 create a legal-fictive relationship with inheritance repercussions, and it is at least plausible if not probable that the implied reader would have 'adoption' among his or her mental furniture. Therefore, without regard for their historicity, Jacob's actions are best understood as an adoption.

### 3.2.5 THE WORTHY SUCCESSOR AND THE PORTRAYAL OF JOSEPH'S SONS

Though one can point to plenty of counter-examples, it has not been uncommon for Manasseh and Ephraim to be imagined as young boys in chapter 48.<sup>323</sup> Historically, this image was based on the understanding that *ויוצא יוסף אתם מעם ברכיו* in 48.12 means that they were sitting on Jacob's lap. The understanding that Jacob's question in verse 8 indicates that he has never before met the two sons of Joseph is also taken as evidence, though at this point it is difficult to tell whether the text itself is primary or the presumed diachronic development of the text is. As demonstrated above, it is not only unnecessary to interpret Jacob's question as an indication of a lack of familiarity, but it is unlikely, unless one presupposes that the P and non-P chronologies are at odds. As to *מעם ברכיו*, it is generally agreed that this does not depict the boys sitting on Jacob's lap (as two small children would),<sup>324</sup> despite the tendency among some older scholars to interpret thus.<sup>325</sup> Rather, this phrase simply describes removal from between or near Jacob's knees and is equally appropriate to describe the posture of 20-year-olds as it is of 3- or 4-year-olds. For this reason it cannot function as diachronic evidence of an alternate chronology.

What, then, is left to suggest that Manasseh and Ephraim are young children rather than young adults? In reality there is nothing. The assumption of competing chronologies has become primary. In other words, a diachronic hypothesis built on

---

<sup>323</sup> For example, see Redford, p. 24; B. Jacob, p. 325. Historically, this is especially true in artwork. Possibly still influenced by this traditional image, some commentators refer to Ephraim and Manasseh in terms associated with children without actually stating a view about their implied age (e.g. Dillmann, p. 429; Amos, p. 267; Hartley, p. 352.). It does not appear to have been the exclusive or necessarily even the dominant view, at least since the late 19th century. See Delitzsch, p. 507; Heinisch, p. 407; more recently Wenham, II, 464; Hamilton, II, 635; Matthews, II, 876.

<sup>324</sup> Delitzsch, p. 507; Driver, p. 377; Skinner, p. 505; Westermann, III, 187; Wenham, II, 464; de Hoop, p. 240.

<sup>325</sup> Gunkel, p. 427; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 357; von Rad, p. 415; Vawter, p. 455; Davidson, p. 294.

unevenness perceived in a synchronic reading is then used as evidence for that very synchronic reading. This methodological circularity is nothing new. It has, in fact, been in evidence for a long time.<sup>326</sup> Take, for example, a sentence from Dillmann's comments showing this sort of causal ambiguation: 'Er kennt sie nicht etwa bloß wegen seines schlechten Gesichtes nicht, sondern hat nach 11 sie überhaupt noch nicht gesehen, denn die Zeitrechnung des A [i.e P] ist hier nicht vorausgesetzt.'<sup>327</sup> The alternate chronology of P is assumed and made the lens through which the final form is interpreted. But unless diachronic evidence is overwhelming and independent of a given problem in a synchronic reading, one cannot reliably use a diachronic hypothesis to clarify that reading, since this would essentially be begging the question.<sup>328</sup>

De Hoop offers a new kind of evidence to support the image of Manasseh and Ephraim as young children—their passivity throughout the scene. Joseph takes them to Jacob, Jacob tells Joseph to bring them, Joseph does, Jacob kisses and embraces them, Joseph removes them from between Jacob's knees and finally Joseph re-presents them to Jacob for blessing. Nowhere do the two lads take any initiative whatsoever. This, de Hoop suggests, shows that they cannot be independent adults but dependent children.<sup>329</sup>

But this evidence falls apart in light of the conventions of the Selection of the Worthy Successor. In death-bed Episodes concerned with the Selection of the Worthy

---

<sup>326</sup> Cassuto, pp. 43-44, observes the same phenomenon. I do not follow Cassuto's conclusion that this sort of circular reasoning necessarily invalidates the Documentary Hypothesis, or any other diachronic theory, in total. In the interpretation of texts a certain degree of circularity is unavoidable, as noted by Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 6, 17-18. Nevertheless, this does not mean that fallacious logic gets a pass, just the benefit of a doubt.

<sup>327</sup> Dillmann, p. 429.

<sup>328</sup> Or, as Carr says, 'an argument primarily from profile is inherently less reliable than an argument from a combination of indicators of seams and profile.' Carr, p. 96.

<sup>329</sup> De Hoop, pp. 340, 427-34.

Successor, appropriate initiative is one of the characteristics of the Worthy Successor over against the Unworthy Competitor (if there is one). However, in cases where the Worthy Successor has an Agent working on his behalf (the servant in Genesis 24, Rebekah in Genesis 27, Bathsheba and Nathan in I Kings 1) that Agent takes on some of those characteristics, and simultaneously the Worthy Successor (Isaac in Genesis 24, Jacob in Genesis 27, Solomon in I Kings 1) exhibits a lack of them. The most consistent such transfer is of initiative. Part of what makes the Agent in these stories effective as an Agent of the Worthy Successor is his or her initiative. In all of these stories, the Worthy Successor is notably passive.<sup>330</sup>

The story of the adoption and blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim is partially ambiguous as to who is considered the Worthy Successor. Is it Joseph or his sons? It can be interpreted either way—and, indeed, the one necessarily involves the other—but from the perspective of the grandsons as Worthy Successors this story follows the pattern of Genesis 24 and 27 and I Kings 1 very closely. The passivity of Isaac, Jacob, and Solomon does not at all necessitate the view of them as children, and neither does the passivity of Manasseh and Ephraim. Rather, this very passivity is a conventional part of the Selection of the Worthy Successor and of the death-bed conventional plot-structure.

### 3.2.6 SUMMARY OF 3.2

The best interpretation of Genesis 48.8–12 is as an adoption ritual that prepares for the subsequent blessing, not a blessing itself. Many features of vv. 8–9a and vv. 9b–12 are characteristic of ritual, and these two sections correspond with sections of

---

<sup>330</sup> Another explanation for the apparent passivity of Manasseh and Ephraim can be found in Olrik's 'epic laws', specifically the 'Law of Two.' The 'Law of Two' is essentially the principle that folklore tends in its staging to limit the active participants to two. If others are present, they are mute observers. Axel Olrik, 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 129–41. Alter (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 94) observes the same feature in Hebrew narrative.

biblical covenant-initiation ceremonies: a confirming dialogue and a confirming event. There is no good reason to doubt the existence of the legal practice of adoption in ancient Israel, but rather very good reason to suppose its presence among the mental furniture of the implied reader. Returning to the conventional features of this passage, the portrayals of Manasseh and Ephraim correspond to the portrayals of Worthy Successor character types in other death-bed stories, while Joseph acts as an Agent of the Worthy Successor.

### 3.3 TESTAMENT B: THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH AND HIS SONS (GENESIS 48.13–20)

13 ויקח יוסף את־שניהם את־אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל ואת־מנשה בשמאל מימין ישראל ויגש אליו: 14 וישלח ישראל את־ימינו וישת על־ראש אפרים והוא הצעיר ואת־שמאלו על־ראש מנשה שכל את־ידיו כי מנשה הבכור: 15 ויברך את־יוסף ויאמר

האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק  
האלהים הרעה אתי מעודי עד־היום הזה:  
16 המלאך הגאל אתי מכל־דע יברך את־הנערים  
ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק  
וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ:

17 וירא יוסף כי־ישית אביו יד־ימינו על־ראש אפרים וירע בעיניו ויתמך יד־אביו להסיר אתה מעל ראש־אפרים על־ראש מנשה: 18 ויאמר יוסף אל־אביו לא־כן אבי כי־זה הבכר שים יצימך על־ראשו: 19 וימאן אביו ויאמר ידעתי בני ידעתי גס־הוא יהיה־לעם יגס־הוא יגדל ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו ויזרעו יהיה מלא־הגוים: 20 ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמור

בך יברך ישראל לאמר  
ישמך אלהים כאפרים וכמנשה

יושם את־אפרים לפני מנשה:

**13** Then Joseph took the two, Ephraim in his right hand opposite the left hand of Israel and Manasseh in his left hand opposite the right hand of Israel, and he brought them near to him. **14** But Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand he placed on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. **15** Then he blessed Joseph and said:

The God before whom my fathers walked, Abraham and Isaac,  
The God who has shepherd me my whole life until this day,

**16** The *mal'ak* who has delivered me from all evil, may he bless the lads.  
And may they be called by my name and by the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac.  
And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the land.

**17** Now Joseph had seen that his father was about to put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and it was not pleasing in his eyes. He grasped the hand of his father in order to move it from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. **18** Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head.' **19** But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son. I know. He too will be a people, and he too will grow. However, his little brother will grow more than he will, and his seed will be a multitude of nations. **20** So he blessed them that day, saying:

By you will Israel bless itself, saying  
'May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'

So he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

The actual blessing in chapter 48 is a conventional event in death-bed stories.<sup>331</sup>

Features like the laying on of hands and the poetic or prophetic nature of the blessing are some of the most identifiable elements of death-bed stories.<sup>332</sup> Jacob's blessing of Joseph through Manasseh and Ephraim implements these conventional elements in a way that is at the same time both unique and reminiscent of other stories, especially of Isaac's blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27. The Patriarchal Promise is itself a narrative pattern in Genesis with an identifiable set of constituent motifs. By taking note of these features of 48.13–22 one can see that 48.1–22 is a coherent and organically unified subunit, which is itself organically integrated into what occurs before and after.

Several details connect Genesis 48.13–20 with the preceding verses 1–12.

Though the poor vision of Jacob is not mentioned explicitly in 48.13–20, virtually all

---

<sup>331</sup> Other death-bed stories with oracular Testaments include those of Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Elisha, Tobit, Mattathias (1 Macc 2), and each of the *T. 12 Patr.*

<sup>332</sup> So much so that scholars have often focused on the blessing itself as the primary defining characteristic of death-bed stories. For example, this appears to be the defining characteristic in Alter's type-scene, 'Testament of the Dying Hero'. In his commentary on Genesis (*The Five Books of Moses*, p. 282) he compares Gen 49 with Deut 33 and 1 Sam 23.1–7. The unifying feature of these three passages would be their oracular nature. More commonly focusing on the tribal list feature of the oracle, others have compared Gen 49 and Deut 33 with Judg 5. Dillmann, pp. 432–33; Gunkel, p. 430; Procksch, p. 272; Speiser, p. 371; Westermann, III, 250; many others. However, the centrality of oracular death-bed pronouncements has, perhaps, been somewhat overstated, causing other less obvious but equally important structural similarities among the stories to be overlooked.

commentators understand the notice in verse 10 to be a part of the subtext of Joseph's careful positioning of his sons and his perception of the reason behind Jacob's hand-crossing. If this reading is accurate, either verse 10a is out of place,<sup>333</sup> or the two scenes of 48.1–12 and 48.13–20 (or at least the greater part of them) are not truly two scenes but one. As de Hoop observes, the question of whether 48.9b–10a is added or misplaced depends on whether or not verse 10a functions in its present position.<sup>334</sup> In fact, if one allows that *ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות* does not describe total blindness, 48.10a is equally and naturally as functional in the background of 48.8, 9b and 11 (ironically) as it is in 48.13–20. It is, then, difficult to justify viewing 9b–10a as either a misplacement or an addition, and this points toward reading verses 8–12 and 13–20 as a single two-part scene. Furthermore, if verse 10a is in the background for verses 13–20 without being misplaced, why could not also 'bless' in verse 9b refer to the events of verses 13–20 and not to verses 10b–12, as I have argued above?

While not typical in the history of Genesis scholarship, other scholars have argued for greater diachronic unity in chapter 48. Carr makes a compelling and detailed case that 48.1–2, 8–14 and 17–20 is an original unity which functions to tie together the Jacob and Joseph complexes in ways no other text in Genesis does.<sup>335</sup> According to Carr 48.3–7, 15–16 and 21–22 have been added to this core for various reasons. I have already argued that verses 3–7 make sense within their present context and form an organic unity in a standard legal form with verses 8–12 (though

---

<sup>333</sup> Either misplaced or a later editorial insertion. So Gunkel, p. 424; Schmidt, p. 260; Westermann, III, 210. Those working primarily within the framework of J, E, and P, like Speiser (*Genesis*, pp. 359–60) often attribute the perceived unevenness to the joining of the J and E traditions.

<sup>334</sup> De Hoop, p. 476.

<sup>335</sup> Carr, p. 253–6; so also Blum, p. 251. Not all who argue for original diachronic diversity blame this on the final editorial hand, however. Redford, pp. 23, 186, suggests that vv. 8–20 were all received by the final hand as a unit. The compiler of the verses, which were originally disparate materials, 'has done a shoddy job of synthesizing it.'



3–6 may indeed be an original P text). The original independence of verses 21–22 is plausible but irrelevant to the present discussion. The secondary nature of verses 15–16 is very commonly held. However, while not critical to my argument, there is even good reason to doubt the evidence usually given to support this position.

### 3.3.1 THE INTEGRITY OF GENESIS 48.15–16

Two features of verses 15–16 are thought to reveal in them a diachronic seam. First is the perception that these verses interrupt the narrative, and that verse 17 follows on more naturally from verse 14 than it does from verse 16. In verse 14, Jacob lays his crossed hands on the heads of Manasseh and Ephraim, and in verse 17 Joseph sees his father do so and takes action to correct it. It is perceived that the speech of verses 15–16 occupies too much narrated time for this series of events to be plausible.

Joseph's correcting actions would have been immediate.<sup>336</sup>

Presuming for the moment the validity of this perception (it is possible that the ancient reader/listener may not have been so fussy over chronological precision), it is not by any means a necessary conclusion that verses 15–16 are secondary. De Hoop argues that the verb *ישית* in verse 17, a *yiqtol* form following a *wayyiqtol* of *ראה* and introduced by the particle *כי*, indicates what is or was going to happen.<sup>337</sup>

---

<sup>336</sup> E.g. Westermann, III, 212. Very often the reasoning behind reconstructing the text through removing vv. 15–16 is not stated, simply presumed. I can only speculate what was in the mind of other scholars when they approached the text, but it appears that when a segment of text can, form-critically, be plausibly distinguished, it is assumed (1) to have been inserted, and (2) to have been inserted at a point in time after the composition of the surrounding text. Neither of these assumptions will hold under scrutiny. Not only is one author capable of composing different kinds of material, but even supposing the likelihood that vv. 15b–16 were a part of a tradition older than the surrounding narrative, there is no need to suppose an intermediate stage when the surrounding narratives were independent.

<sup>337</sup> De Hoop, p. 342; also Lowenthal, p. 140; Hamilton, II, 639. This is consistent with the incipient past non-perfective use of the *yiqtol* form noted in *IBHS* §31.2 *c*. It is not mentioned specifically in Joüon, but the aspect is related some uses mentioned, especially the 'past future' (§133 *b*) and the modal nuances (§133 *l*). Once again, Waltke (*Genesis*, p. 600; see also *IBHS* §33.2.3) is wrong to impose a pluperfect tense/aspect onto the *wayyiqtol* form. Even if a pluperfect makes sense in this situation, this meaning would have to derive from contextual clues, not from that form. It is not Waltke's understanding of narrated time that is problematic. It is strictly his way of reading that time

Verse 17 would then be rendered, ‘When Joseph saw that his father was about to lay his right hand upon the head of Ephraim ....’ This would mean that narrated time is not flowing consistently in narrative time, but rather looks back a bit in verse 17, or as de Hoop says, ‘verses 17–19 function as a kind of parenthesis, or as a *nachholende Erzählung*, telling what Joseph did before Jacob pronounced the blessing on the two boys.’<sup>338</sup> In de Hoop’s opinion, this interpretation argues against a diachronic development in 48.13–20, and I concur.<sup>339</sup> This understanding of verse 17 would actually make it less appropriate immediately after verse 14 (since Jacob’s hands are laid on the lads in verse 14), so the insertion of verses 15–16 would have had to be accompanied by an adjustment to verse 17 (from some other verb form than *yiqtol* יִשִּׁית, perhaps a *qatal*).

The second clue that verses 15–16 were inserted is the fact that the Hebrew reads in verse 15, יִבְרַךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף—‘he blessed Joseph.’ Many commentators find this baffling since Manasseh and Ephraim are the ones over whom the blessing is pronounced, and they prefer the Greek reading αὐτοῦς<sup>340</sup> (Hebrew אֹתָם), though there is no satisfactory mechanical explanation for how אֹתָם could have become אֶת־יוֹסֵף (a movement by the Greek translators in the other direction is easily explained as a smoothing of the text motivated by the same confusion expressed by modern commentators). The MT reading is the more difficult reading without being

---

from the grammatical forms of the narrative. De Hoop’s understanding is superior.

<sup>338</sup> De Hoop, p. 342. For another application of the *nachholende Erzählung* concept, see Norbert Lohfink, ‘Und Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jona 4:5)’, *BZ*, 5 (1961), 185–203. In more conventional scholarly terms, we might refer to Gen 48.17–19 as an internal analepsis (see Genette, p. 49; Baldick, p. 13), or to 48.20 as a resumptive repetition (Sternberg, pp. 245, 414; Curt Kuhl, ‘Die “Wiederaufnahme” - ein literarkritisches Prinzip?’, *ZAW*, 64 (1952), 1–11).

<sup>339</sup> De Hoop, pp. 343, 479.

<sup>340</sup> Dillmann, p. 430; Procksch, p. 424; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 357; Westermann, III, 189; Hamilton, II, 633. Speiser’s suggestion that בְּנֵי has dropped out is pure speculation.

impossible or even improbable, and it is therefore preferable to the Greek reading.<sup>341</sup> Without a text-critical explanation, some commentators have divided verse 15a from 15b–16, meaning either that an original blessing of Joseph is now lost or that it was originally only a narrated blessing without dialogue.<sup>342</sup>

But is there really a problem here? The perception of a problem has never been universal: Joseph is naturally blessed through the blessing of his sons,<sup>343</sup> and it is important to remember that the main target of blessing in chapter 48 is Joseph in contrast with his eleven brothers. Joseph is presented in this chapter both as the Worthy Successor and as an Agent. Most fundamentally in the wider death-bed story, however, he is the Worthy Successor. He is the one to whom the burial request is directed in 47.29–31, and he is the one who is presented by name as taking primary responsibility in accomplishing that task. If one takes Genesis 48 as a unit, Joseph, not his sons, is the primary object of blessing, receiving promises of descendants, protection, reputation and land (verses 21–22; see section 3.4 below).

Note also the way the blessing of verses 15–16 refers to Manasseh and Ephraim in the third person, whereas the blessing of verse 20 (which is prefaced by **וַיְבָרֶכֶם**—‘he blessed them’) refers to them in the second person. The blessings of 27.27–29, 27.39–40, and 28.3–4 are all, with a small exception in 27.27, addressed in the second person. The sayings of chapter 49 go back and forth between second and third person forms, so verbal person is not absolutely conclusive. It is conspicuous,

---

<sup>341</sup> De Hoop, p. 343. For a discussion of the uses and limitations of the *lectio difficilior praeferenda* principle, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 302–305. In this case, no mechanical error can account for the more difficult MT reading, but editorial smoothing on the part of the Greek translators is entirely plausible.

<sup>342</sup> Ruppert, p. 164; Westermann, III, 212–13; De Hoop, pp. 479–90.

<sup>343</sup> König, pp. 746–7; Wenham, II, 465; Sarna, p. 328; Arnold, p. 376; Matthews, II, 878; Lowenthal, p. 139; Waltke, p. 599; Wilson, pp. 198–99. De Hoop (p. 343) agrees in theory that Joseph being blessed through his sons is ‘very probable in the light of the Semitic concept of corporate personality’, but concludes that this cannot be the case here since ‘these two are not Joseph’s sons anymore.’ As mentioned above, de Hoop’s understanding of adoption is faulty; so also his rationale for seeing a diachronic seam here is faulty. See also Schmidt, p. 266.

however, that the blessing of Joseph refers to the sons in the third person while the blessing of the sons themselves refers to them in the second person. The object of the blessing is also the direct addressee. This is, in fact, important evidence against the idea that verses 15–16 and most of verse 20 are originally one blessing tradition that has been divided at a late date as part of its insertion into the narrative context. Verse 20 (or 20b, or 20aβ) does not follow on to verse 16 as naturally as some assert.<sup>344</sup>

Another way to read this text as unproblematic is to understand the name Joseph as a collective reference to the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Joseph as a combined name for the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh is not at all uncommon.<sup>345</sup> The sayings concerning the sons in chapter 49 are presented as prophetic blessings for their eponymous tribes (the sons are even presented in 49.28 as ‘the twelve tribes of Israel’). The content of the blessing in 48.15–16 is mostly concerned with an increase in their descendants, not in them as individuals. So it is a natural reading to take ‘he blessed Joseph’ as a prophetic blessing of the Joseph tribes. But whether one takes Joseph as referring to the individual or to the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Genesis 48.15a presents no difficulty that requires diachronic explanation. If it does belong to an originally separate document or saying, it has been perfectly integrated into its surroundings.

### 3.3.2 THE TWO BLESSINGS OF GENESIS 48.15–16 AND 48.20

At times, commentators seem to take the very presence of two blessing statements as itself indicative of variant blessing traditions which the editor has tried (rather unsuccessfully) to integrate into a single story. Von Rad, for example, says, ‘Jacob

---

<sup>344</sup> This opinion shows up especially in older commentators: Dillmann, p. 430; Procksch, p. 426; Gunkel, p. 428. More recently, Ruppert’s position (p. 164) is a kind of mediating one—both blessing statement go back to E, but different layers within E, so they are not an original unit.

<sup>345</sup> See, for example, Num 13.11; 26.28, 37; 36.1, 5, 12; Josh 16.1; 17.14, 16, 17; Judg 1.22, 23, 35; II Sam 19.20; I Kgs 11.28; I Chr 7.29. ‘Joseph’ is also used as a collective to refer to the Northern Kingdom in the Psalms and Prophets.

gives the blessing itself in two sayings (vs. 15–16 and verse 20). Obviously the one who combined the two older forms of the narrative did not want to sacrifice either of them.<sup>346</sup> The logic is faulty. Why could an editor presumably not combine the sayings into a single saying (as, in fact, some commentators have done)? In fact, the two sayings work very well in juxtaposition at the synchronic level.<sup>347</sup> Taking their separation at face value as indicative of two blessing traditions is not a principle whose inverse is then applied by most critics to chapter 49, which is commonly thought to be a collection of originally separate tribal sayings.<sup>348</sup> There is not a consistent rationale to explain why the blessing of verses 15–16 would not have been inserted at the beginning of verse 20.

The final form of the text provides better answers. In addition to being a conventional death-bed story, the story self-consciously recalls the blessing of Jacob over Esau in Genesis 27.1–40, and in more ways than is commonly recognised. While the reversal of primogeniture is one of the most recognisable themes in Genesis, the occurrence of such a reversal in a death-bed story is found elsewhere in Genesis only in chapter 27 (though this dynamic also characterises I Kings 1). The two stories share a number of commonly noted elements, including the poor vision of the dying character, the sitting-up action (with the implication of a bed as the location) and the embrace. In addition, both stories contain two poetic/prophetic

---

<sup>346</sup> Von Rad, pp. 416–7. See also Redford, p. 23.

<sup>347</sup> Even with the consequent shift in person of the verb; cf. Gen 27.27–29 (3rd to 2nd); 49.8–12 (2nd to 3rd); 49.22–26 (3rd to 2nd and back to 3rd). Van Seters (p. 321) agrees.

<sup>348</sup> Speiser, pp. 370–72; Von Rad, p. 421; Westermann, III, 220. Others, returning to an older trend (Driver, p. 379; Skinner, p. 508), have called this understanding of ch. 49 into question. De Hoop's book is a meticulous example of this trend. Some parts of Gen 49, according to de Hoop, do not seem separable from their present location, nor is there a plausible context for their independent transmission. Wenham (II, 469–70) and Redford (pp. 24–25, 27) treat Gen 49 as a coherent composition. Seebaß would date much of it as a unified composition very early (12th or 13th century BCE). Horst Seebaß, 'Die Stämmesprüche Gen 49 3–27', *ZAW*, 96 (1984), 333–50.

blessing statements separated by someone expressing displeasure about the first statement.

	Genesis 27.27–40	Genesis 48.15–20
Blessing A	vv. 27–29	vv. 15–16
Displeasure at Blessing A	vv. 30–38	vv. 17–19
Blessing B	vv. 39–40	v. 20

This parallel structure is admittedly very broad, but it occurs in the Hebrew Bible (as far as I have been able to locate) only in these two stories.<sup>349</sup> If this is an intentionally parallel structure, it helps strengthen the argument for the literary unity of 48.13–20, and indeed for the entirety of chapter 48, given the other parallels with chapter 27 found in 48.1–12.

It is not, in fact, necessary to look on the two blessings in 48.15–16 and 20 as two unique events. The anachrony in verse 17 where the narrative time moves backward slightly to a point in time somewhere within verse 14 means that verse 20 could be read as a continuation of verses 15–16, but as mentioned above this becomes less likely in light of the shift in grammatical person of the object. A more conventional solution is entails locating verse 20 not strictly within the timeline. The narrator prefaces the blessing with ‘And he blessed them that day, saying ...’ and concludes the blessing with ‘and he placed Ephraim before Manasseh.’ The latter is clearly a recapitulating summary, and the former’s ‘that day’ points in this direction, as well.<sup>350</sup>

---

<sup>349</sup> Wenham (II, 466) also notes this structural parallel.

<sup>350</sup> Recapitulating summaries are types of concluding statements whose surface information is partially redundant, but the restatement of which highlights the central point of the preceding narrative. Examples of recapitulating summaries in Genesis include: 9.17; 17.26–27; 19.29; 23.20; 25.34b; and 30.43.

What does all this mean, since some of the preceding arguments seem to work against one another? The two blessing statements in verses 15–16 and verse 20 are two unique statements that function in two unique ways. The former is a blessing of Joseph (hence the MT reading), and the second is more specifically a blessing of his sons. It is unlikely, given grammatical differences, that they were ever a single unit, though the reading of them as two parts of a single speech event is made possible by the internal anaeleipsis in verses 17–19. It is not necessary, however, to view them as two competing and partially redundant traditions which have been preserved rather awkwardly next to each other simply because the final editor did not wish to eliminate either of them. The final form can be read as coherently structured. Verses 15–20 resemble Genesis 27.27–40: a blessing, an expression of displeasure, and a second blessing. This comparison is apt, as well, because of the numerous parallels between 48.1–12 and chapter 27. Another plausible way to see the two blessings working together (and not necessarily mutually exclusive with what else has been said) is to view verse 20 as a recapitulating summary that highlights a different facet of the total blessing.

### 3.4 TESTAMENT C: THE INDIVIDUAL BLESSING OF JOSEPH (GENESIS 48.21–22)

21 ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף הנה אנכי מת והיה אלהים עמכם והשיב אתכם אל-ארץ אבותיכם: 22 ואני נתתי לך שכם אחד על-אחיך אשר לקחתי מיד האמרי בהרבי ובקשתי:

21 And Israel said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and return you to the land of your fathers. 22 I give to you *Shekem* 'Ahad over your brothers, which I have taken from the hand of the Amorites by my sword and my bow.'

Thus far in Genesis 48 we have dealt just with the synchronic unity of verses 1–20, a unity that the surface features of the narrative support and that the conventional structure of the death-bed type-scene corroborates. To reiterate, death-bed stories are

often made up of more than one Episode. The division of Jacob's death-bed story that was derived from features of the narrative (like tempo, the presence or absence of certain characters, the theme of the Testament) falls into four parts (47.28–31; 48.1–22; 49.1–28; 49.29–33) whose characteristics match those observed in Episodes of other death-bed stories.

But what does one do with verses 21–22? It is a scene where Manasseh and Ephraim fade from view, which has its own summoning and approaching death motifs, which appears, at first glance, to have a unique theme (a blessing of Joseph with land versus an adoption and blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim as twin tribes), and which is, in fact, set apart from verses 1–20 by a shift in narrative tempo similar (but not identical) to that separating 49.28 and 49.29 (see chapter 4). These four features argue for a structural differentiation between 48.1–20 and 48.21–22.<sup>351</sup> If this division is of equal weight with the divisions between 47.31 and 48.1 and between 48.22 and 49.1, then the overall structure of Jacob's death-bed story is better understood as a five-part concentricism:

- A. Jacob's burial request to Joseph (47.28–31)
- B. Jacob's adoption and blessing of Joseph's sons (48.1–20)
- C. Jacob's land blessing for Joseph (48.21–22)
- B'. Jacob's blessing of all twelve sons (49.1–28)
- A'. Jacob's burial request to all twelve sons (49.29–33)

This reading has no obvious weakness other than the variance in narrative time: Episode C is significantly shorter than the other Episodes (and this is not really a weakness since it is the centre of the concentric structure and has no parallel section). I still think, however, that 48.21–22 fits better as a subsection of Episode B, whose theme would be 'Jacob's special blessing of Joseph.' First of all, the shift in narrative tempo in verse 20 is not identical to that of 49.28. Whereas verse 20 is a sort of summary where narrated time is still moving forward, 49.28 creates a

---

<sup>351</sup> So Seebaß, 29–43.



temporary pause in narrated time (more on this in the next chapter). Though the summary of 48.20 is the kind of interruption of narrated time that often serves as an indicator to the reader of structural disjunction, narrated time is still moving forward without ellipsis. The pause of 49.28 is an interruption of a greater order.<sup>352</sup>

Second, while new Episodes do frequently begin with an approaching death motif or a summoning formula/speech introduction, these motifs are not necessarily indicative of completely new Episodes. David's summons in I Kings 1.28 and 32 do not introduce new Episodes. Non-initial approaching death motifs are more common (Genesis 50.24; Deuteronomy 31.16; Joshua 23.2, 14; II Kings 2.3, 5, 10). What more fundamentally differentiates one Episode from another is uniqueness of theme and addressee.

The disappearance of Manasseh and Ephraim is not problematic. The blessings of verses 15–16 and verse 20 are complementary, especially when Joseph is seen as the primary intended recipient in chapter 48. Joseph is at the same time both Worthy Successor and Agent to Manasseh and Ephraim as Worthy Successors, but Manasseh and Ephraim are only depicted in this role because Joseph is the primary Worthy Successor and recipient of the double portion. So even where the blessing is about Manasseh and Ephraim, it is more fundamentally about Joseph. This consistency of theme and addressee points toward the entirety of chapter 48 being read together as a coherent unit.

This Joseph-centric reading is verified by reading this whole chapter in light of the Patriarchal Promise of Genesis and of its standard components. Promise texts from P and non-P sources have distinct phrases and characteristics, but even so the content of both P and non-P Promise/blessing texts tend to fall into certain kinds of headings. Rendtorff organizes the motifs into four groups: land, descendants,

---

<sup>352</sup> Albeit admittedly not as disjunctive as the ellipses that separate 47.31 from 48.1 and 48.22 from 49.1. De Hoop (pp. 317-18) also considers the transition in 48.1 to be stronger than that in 48.21.

blessing, and guidance.<sup>353</sup> Clines finds three headings: posterity, divine-human relationship, and land. His ‘divine-human relationship’ category encompasses both blessing and guidance.<sup>354</sup> However, Clines’s rubric is more appropriate for P texts than non-P texts.<sup>355</sup> In passages like Genesis 12.1–3, not only are the items of the blessing less distinct from one another, but one could justifiably divide ‘relationship’ promises into two categories: protection and reputation. Both categories concern the relationship of the Patriarchs and their descendants to the other nations of the earth and Yahweh’s direct involvement in these relationships. Under the heading of ‘protection’ belong those promises pertaining to actual interactions with other nations (belligerent or friendly) like ‘Everyone who curses you I will curse, and everyone who blesses you I will bless.’ Under the term ‘reputation’ go promises that other nations will respect the future Israelites, especially as found in those variations of the phrase ‘in/by you all the nations of the earth will bless themselves’ (which occurs six times and only in non-P texts: 12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4; 28.14; 48.20). For non-P texts, then, the total blessing is better encapsulated in four categories: posterity, land, protection and reputation.<sup>356</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that, prior to chapter 48,

---

<sup>353</sup> Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 57–68.

<sup>354</sup> David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup, 10 (Sheffield: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978), p. 29.

<sup>355</sup> I make this distinction in as purely descriptive a way as possible, without making assertions as to the compositional history of Genesis. Even at the synchronic level there are clear differences between the Promise texts traditionally attributed to P and non-P (mostly J).

<sup>356</sup> This relates very closely to Rendtorff’s four categories, but I feel that the ‘guidance’ elements, which are the ‘I will be with you’ statements, are better understood as ‘protection’, since the purpose of these statements is not wisdom to make right decisions but divine guardianship behind the scenes. In non-P texts, the ‘blessing’ elements are more precisely described as pertaining to reputation, since all of the elements are blessings. Once again, in P texts, these four categories are not found as such. Nicholas P. Lunn, ‘Patterns in the Old Testament Metanarrative: Human Attempts to Fulfill Divine Promises’, *WTJ*, 72, no. 2 (2010), 237–249, adds to Clines’ three categories a different fourth: kings. The promise of kings among one’s descendants, however, only occurs twice and only in P texts (chs 17 and 35). In non-P texts there is a theme of ruling over one’s neighbour or enemies which may be comparable (found in 22.17; 24.60; 27.29). I have considered this theme in non-P texts under ‘protection’, however, since in P texts this promise seems to have more to do with the posterity of the patriarch.

three prominently-placed non-P Promise passages contain all four elements: 12.1–3, 26.2–5 and 28.13–15. Notably, all three of these texts occur at or near the beginning of—and are thematic for—the story cycles of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

	12.1–3	26.2–5	28.13–15	48.1–22
Posterity	12.2	26.4	28.14	48.16
Land	12.1	26.3–4	28.13	48.22
Protection	12.3	26.3	28.15	48.15
Reputation	12.2–3	26.4	28.14	48.20

Possibly because Joseph is not a unique possessor of the Patriarchal Promise but shares it with his brothers, the total blessing is not reiterated at the beginning of the Joseph story. Whatever the reason, the substance of the Patriarchal Promise is not transferred to Jacob’s sons until his death-bed story. Here, however, the elements of the non-P blessing are not spoken directly by God, and they are not given in a concise way. The blessing of 48.15–16 is concerned with posterity and protection, while that of verse 20 is a unique implementation of the reputation element that narrows the scope from the nations of the world to the Israelites.<sup>357</sup> But where is the land blessing? It is not until verses 21–22 that the fourth element of the non-P Patriarchal Promise appears in the form of a particular land grant to Joseph. Only when read as a whole does Joseph receive a full blessing, and this is why I would consider verses 21–22 not to be a separate Episode but rather a subsection of the second Episode of Jacob’s death-bed story.<sup>358</sup>

---

<sup>357</sup> This has a superlative effect—if Israel will be the proverbial blessing of the world, how much more blessed will be the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh if Israel blesses with their names. Waltke, p. 600. Ruth 4.11 is an example of the kind of popular blessing this blessing predicts (Wenham, II, 466), and it seems likely that this is an aetiology for a popular blessing familiar to the implied reader (Arnold, p. 376).

<sup>358</sup> Van Seters (p. 322) also reads vv. 21–22 as organically whole with the preceding blessings in ch. 48, understanding v. 21 to complete the theme of divine protection and project it into the future.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

Genesis 48.1–22 is the second Episode of Jacob's death-bed story and is a coherent subunit whose unifying theme is the selection and blessing of Joseph as Worthy Successor. It is separated from the first Episode (47.28–31) and the third Episode (49.1–28) by shifts in narrative tempo and especially ellipses. The Episode consists of a conventional Preparation (verses 1–2) and a Testament made up of an adoption ritual (verses 3–12) and blessings (verses 13–22).

The adoption ritual follows the shape of covenant events like Exodus 19 and Joshua 24. It consists of an historical prologue (verses 3–4), a declaration of intent (verses 5–6), a further rationale (verse 7), a confirming dialogue (verses 8–9a) and a confirming event (verses 9b–12). The features of this passage which have usually been taken as indicators of unevenness and clues to the text's compositional history have a more compelling synchronic explanation when read as ritual.

Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim establishes the legal justification for his blessing of them as his own heirs alongside his other eleven sons. He appears to select them as dual Worthy Successors, with Joseph acting as an Agent. Nevertheless, this blessing is more fundamentally a blessing of Joseph as Worthy Successor and first among Jacob's twelve sons (as is indicated by the singular object of verse 15, which is not a mistake in the MT). Once again, the rationale for diachronic analysis of the text, and especially for the excising of verses 15–16 as non-original, proves to be the result of an incomplete reading of the text as it stands. The blessings of verses 15–16 and verse 20 are shown to be complementary, not competing. A Joseph-centric reading also explains the relevance and organic appropriateness of verses 21–22, especially in light of the standard four elements of the non-P Patriarchal Promise in Genesis. Only by taking all three blessings in

chapter 48 is the total non-P blessing bestowed. Thus in one composite chapter, the narrator has combined both recurring blessing traditions into a single pericope.

# 4 THE BLESSING OF THE TWELVE

---

*Genesis 49.1–28*

## 4.0 TEXT AND PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1 ויקרא יעקב אל-בניו ויאמר ... 28 כל-אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר וזאת אשר-דבר להם  
אביהם ויברך אותם איש אשר כברכתו ברך אתם:

1 And Jacob called to his sons and said ... 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is that which their father said to them. And he blessed them—each according to his own blessing he blessed them.<sup>359</sup>

In looking at Genesis 49.1–28, the primary concern is not with the content of the oracle/blessing, about which a tremendous amount has been written, but with its narrative framing, or the way the oracle has been integrated into its current setting. All that needs to be said is that aspects of content-type of the Testament are not uncommon.<sup>360</sup> Of utmost importance are the conventional elements of the death-bed story framework in verses 1a and 28, the Episode's synchronic unity (despite the possibility that the blessing derives from older material), its distinction from the surrounding Episodes, and the characterisation of the twelve sons of Jacob as Worthy co-Successors.

---

<sup>359</sup> Because I am not treating Gen 49.2–27, the only possible text-critical issue is the word אשר. See discussion below in section 4.2 (n. 374).

<sup>360</sup> Oracular poetry in the context of a hero's end of life is also found in Gen 27; Deut 32–33; 1 Sam 23.1–7; the *T. 12 Patr.*; Tob 13–14; Jdt. This is, in fact, the most enduring aspect of death-bed stories as the genre became a typical setting for apocalyptic or visionary oracle (*T. 3 Patr.*; *T. Adam*; *T. Mos*; et al).

## 4.1 THE SUMMONING OF THE TWELVE (GENESIS 49.1A)

This Episode begins straightaway with a standard summoning motif (ויקרא [subject] אל [object] ויאמר) to introduce the Testament. It lacks its own Preparation section.

This sometimes happens in non-initial Episodes of multi-Episode death-bed stories (Joshua 24.1; 1 Chronicles 28.1; 29.10). In their present state, these Episodes assume the setting and motivation of preceding Episodes. If such non-initial Episodes had some kind of life prior to their inclusion in their present settings, this fact shows intentional and transformational editorial work.

Genesis 49.1a is most likely original to its present setting. Despite near unanimity among diachronic analyses, there is almost no justification for assigning 49.1a to P, and such an assignment certainly does not aid in our understanding of the passage. The typical strands of P's version of Jacob's death-bed story are understood to be 47.27–28, 48.3–6/7, 49.1a, 49.28b/29–33 and 50.12–13. It is true that 47.27–28, 48.3–6, 49.29–33 and 50.12–13 have characteristics typically associated with P material, but this observation in itself says nothing about the text's pre-history. The attribution of some part of 49.1 to P has historically been motivated, at least in part, by an assumption of a previously existing P document which has been preserved mostly intact in the final form, albeit divided up and scattered. It is far from certain, however, that these segments are the remnants of a once independent tradition which a later editor has attempted to reconcile with another tradition, or, even if they are such remnants, that we should expect to find a coherent P document scattered among the pieces of the final form.<sup>361</sup>

This is especially true with the attribution of 49.1a to P. What is the basis of this attribution, aside from the need to find isolated segments of the final form that

---

<sup>361</sup> Rendtorff (*Problem*, pp. 136–176) successfully puts the burden of proof back on those arguing for an independent P document.

can be plausibly stitched together into a coherent P document? The verbs קרא and אמר are far too common to be useful linguistic data. This leaves two potential features: the preposition אל and the personal name יעקב. But the preposition אל is itself also too frequently occurring to be used to differentiate between sources. What about the combination אל + קרא, as opposed to, say, ל + קרא or some other combination in contexts where the meaning is ‘to summon’ (rather than ‘to name’ or ‘to cry out’)? Here again the data cannot be used to distinguish among sources, since one finds among texts attributed to J, E and P examples of ויקרא אל and ויקרא ל without any distinction in meaning.<sup>362</sup> This is a standard summoning formula that, when combined with others features like the change of addressee from Joseph to all twelve sons, demarcates what follows as a new Episode in the death-bed story.<sup>363</sup>

This leaves the personal name ‘Jacob’ as the sole feature of 49.1a that possibly points to P. The overly tidy suggestion that J simply tends more toward ‘Israel’ can be dismissed.<sup>364</sup> Furthermore, in light of the fact that ‘Jacob’ has also been understood as indicative of E, the observation that P tends toward ‘Jacob’ and the use of ‘Jacob’ to argue for P are not logically equivalent exercises. While P texts are consistent in referring to Jacob as ‘Jacob’ except in chapter 35, non-P texts still prefer ‘Jacob’ over ‘Israel’, using ‘Israel’ as a marked form reserved for inheritance

<sup>362</sup> Traditional J texts with אל, see 3.9; 19.5; with ל, see 12.18; 24.57, 58; 26.9; with definite direct object marker את, see 27.1, 42; 47.29. E texts with אל, see 21.17; 22.11; 22.15; with ל, see 20.8, 9; 31.4, 54; P texts with אל, see 28.1 and 49.1; Joseph story or JE with ל, see 39.14; 46.33; with את, see 41.8, 14. The reason Gunkel (p. 448) takes אל + קרא as indicative of P was very simply because it showed up in 28.1, another death-bed story.

<sup>363</sup> Wenham (II, 417) asserts that the summoning motif ‘intimates the importance of the message.’ He is correct, but with this qualification: it is not the simply phrase in itself that does this, but its function as a summoning motif at the beginning of death-bed stories that lends the phrase its portentous sound. The summoning of an audience is a very frequent occurrence in Genesis and in Hebrew narrative, generally, but death-bed stories account for very few these. Moreover, Wenham was only looking at ויקרא אל which led him to consider only Gen 3.9, 22.11, 22.15 and Exod 19.3 for comparison. But a survey of the occurrences of the phrases in Genesis show that there is no semantic or source-critical distinction among ויקרא אל/ל/ויקרא את. So Wenham is right, but it was his reading instinct, not his data, that led him there.

<sup>364</sup> See section 3.1.1 above.



business relating to the first-born designation or for issues of national scope. Even in chapter 48, where ‘Israel’ is preferred because of the inheritance context, ‘Jacob’ still shows up in a traditionally non-P text (48.1–2). There are, then, no seams in the final form to indicate an original separation between verses 1a and 1b–27. Any attribution of verse 1a to a previously existing P document into which verses 1b–27 or 28a has been inserted is based on theoretical presuppositions about the composition of the text rather than strictly on features of the text. This is not to deny the possibility that verses 1b–27 or 28a were once, in fact, an independent collection. Rather, I am pointing out that 49.1a belongs naturally where it is and is in no way in conflict with its surroundings, and that to propose that it is a part of a previously existing P document into which verses 1b–27 or 28a have been inserted is premature and not strictly based on features of the text.<sup>365</sup>

Even though there is no good reason to suppose that 49.1a ever belonged to anything other than its present context, the change in name to ‘Jacob’ still teases the mind. Is there a plausible synchronic explanation for this change? Looking at the narrator’s voice in the first two Episodes in 47.28–48.22, even though Jacob is referred to as ‘Jacob’ four times (twice in 47.28, once each in 48.2 and 3), the preferred name is ‘Israel’ (ten times). In the narrator’s voice in 49.1–33, ‘Israel’ only occurs in 49.28 (but this is clearly a telescoping and aetiological reference to the nation—the mention of the twelve ‘tribes’). Instead, ‘Jacob’ is used twice. Interestingly, if one looks at 47.28 as a preface for the whole death-bed story and not just for the first Episode,<sup>366</sup> and if one considers references to Jacob in the Epilogue, the occurrences balance out even better.

---

<sup>365</sup> De Hoop (pp. 85–6) considers plausible an original connection of v. 1a with vv. 1b–28. From the other side of vv. 1b–28a, Westermann (III, 198) argues that 28b’s ויברך requires an introduction in P texts, meaning this word never starts a clause but always follows in a verb pair. But see Gen 1.22, 28; 2.3; 9.1; 25.11—all traditionally P texts. While it is common to find ויברך following ויקרא or a Niphal of ראה, this sort of construction is certainly not required. Therefore, 49.28b does not imply an original connection with 49.1a.

- A1. Frame/Introduction (47.28)—Jacob x 2  
 A2. Jacob's burial request to Joseph (47.29–31)—Israel x 2  
     B. Jacob's blessing of Joseph (48.1–22)—Israel x 8; Jacob x 2  
     B'. Jacob's blessing of the twelve (49.1–28)—Jacob x 1  
 A2'. Jacob's burial request to the twelve (49.29–33)—Jacob x 1  
 A1'. Frame/Epilogue (50.1–21)—Israel x 1

Taking the dominant name in chapter 48, this creates a different, but complementary pattern: A-B-B-A-A-B (or J-I-I-J-J-I). Admittedly, this only accounts for the occurrences of the personal names Jacob and Israel in the narrator's voice. Total occurrences (meaning inclusive of occurrences within character dialogue and of references to Israel as a people group) do not show this kind of organisation, particularly disrupting the balance of the third Episode (Genesis 49.1–28). But in this case, the middle two Episodes are comparable in that they use both names, the outer two Episodes choose one (Israel in the former, Jacob in the latter), and the frames choose one (Jacob in the former, Israel in the latter), so the overall balance is still somewhat preserved.

Theme	Burial		Blessing		Burial	
Addressee	Joseph as Addressee			The Twelve as Addressees/Actors		
Theme + Addressee + Framework	A1—Frame	A2—Burial Request	B—Blessing	B'—Blessing	A2'—Burial Request	A1'—Frame
Dominant name	Jacob	Israel	Both	Both	Jacob	Israel

In short, Jacob's death-bed story exhibits order in its use of Jacob's two names that coordinates with other macrostructural indicators. The significance of this order, if there is a significance beyond the aesthetic, is unclear. Is there some special reason that the Joseph Episodes prefer Israel and the twelve sons Episodes prefer Jacob? Perhaps a diachronic explanation is in order, but the fact that the combination of source material produces this kind of symmetry only demonstrates that the hand

<sup>366</sup> De Hoop (p. 325) considers 47.27–28 to be just this sort of preface. Based on the most likely meaning of 'Israel' in v. 27, however, I still think it appropriate to keep them separate.

responsible for the final form has exerted transformative compositional influence in the shape of this story and that the entirety (47.28–50.26) should be read as a whole, not as a patchwork or medley.<sup>367</sup>

## 4.2 GENESIS 49.28 AS A CLIMAX AND CHANGES IN NARRATIVE TEMPO

Genesis 49.28 corresponds to the section I have called the Denouement, but this is not entirely accurate as an analysis of the plot. Usually, the post-Testament narrative material is falling action or closure. Here, however, it feels like climax. This chapter is, in fact, the dramatic climax of Genesis. If it were a modern movie, verse 28 would be the moment when the tribal fathers pose together, the orchestra swelling in a fully realised form of the musical theme which has hitherto been only hinted. Using Longacre's concepts terminology, the problem with my use of the term 'denouement' is in relation to the structure of a plot, 'denouement' is a notional structure, but I have used the word as a name for a topical structure (post-Testament narrative) that generally, but not always corresponds to the notional structure 'denouement'. Other candidate terms, however, like 'conclusion', entail their own problems, so I have chosen to stick with 'denouement' with this caveat.

The two halves of 49.28 are dramatic elongations whose exact phrasing is not strictly necessary,<sup>368</sup> but it is appropriate for the climactic aspect of the moment,

---

<sup>367</sup> In a kind of inversion of Redford's association of 'Jacob' with the Reuben-version and 'Israel' with the Judah-version (pp. 178–79), De Hoop (pp. 501–2) proposes that the name 'Israel', when it occurs alone, is connected with his pro-Joseph layer, while his pro-Judah layer uses both 'Israel' and 'Jacob.' This proposal solves some problems associated with previous schemas, but it creates others and ignores the similarities of P material in the Joseph story with P material outside of it (is P pro-Judah? Does the pro-Judah/pro-Joseph dichotomy extend outside of the Joseph story?). I remain unconvinced. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with de Hoop that the narrative framework of Gen 49.1–28 is not easily separated from vv. 2–27.

<sup>368</sup> The division of v. 28 along diachronic lines just before **וַיְבָרֶךְ** has been consistent down through Westermann, III, 223, who maintains the division because, he argues, **וַיְבָרֶךְ** is elsewhere used as an

being formal and a pause of narrated time.<sup>369</sup> The first sentence, כל־אלה שבטי ישראל, אביהם<sup>370</sup> שנים עשר וזאת אשר־דבר להם, contains no unique information other than identifying the twelve sons with the twelve tribes. This is the first and only occurrence in Genesis of the term שבטי ישראל שנים עשר. Except for two other instances earlier in chapter 49, this is the only occurrence of שבט in Genesis. On the other hand, the use of the word שבט in phrases like ‘the twelve tribes of Israel’ or ‘the tribe of Judah/Issachar/etc.’ is standard terminology throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, former Prophets, and Chronicler history (it rarely carries its other primary meaning of ‘rod’ in the narrative literature, though that meaning is far more common in the latter Prophets, other than Ezekiel and Hosea, and in the Writings, other than Chronicles). The sudden appearance of one of the standard terms for referencing the entire nation of Israel highlights that this is the point to which Genesis has been driving all along.<sup>371</sup> The second clause of the sentence is simply a

---

introductory formula (and here it would be a concluding formula). But the constituent elements of a conventional plot structure are not frozen in place. Rather, they are often highly mobile. Even as close as the preceding Episode, the blessing motif shows up toward the end rather than at the beginning. If Westermann means more specifically a speech introduction, then the question arises: where is the speech it is introducing? The division of v. 28 into two diachronic layers, whether J and P or anything else, is, like many other traditional diachronic divisions in Genesis, built upon the assumptions of an earlier age. The partial redundancy between 28a and 28b is not a grounds for diachronic distinction, since this redundancy has a function in the narrative.

<sup>369</sup> Following Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 93–95, a pause is a tempo wherein narrated time stops while narrative time continues (it is the inverse of an ellipsis). It is generally used to focus the attention of the audience at significant moments in a plot. This is noted by Longacre (*Grammar*, p. 39) as ‘rhetorical underlining’.

<sup>370</sup> The issue whether להם is best understood as indicating direction (‘to them’) or relation (‘concerning them’) is irrelevant to this discussion. Speiser (p. 375) makes the case that, because the subject in v. 28a are the tribes (rather than the individuals), the comparatively less common but still well-attested use of prep. ל with a sense something very close to על (see BDB, p. 514, esp. §5 e; Joüon §133 d). So also Lowenthal, p. 144. If Speiser is correct, the narrator is simply making explicit the aetiological intent of the preceding oracle. This aetiological intent is assumed if ל means ‘to’ and the object is the sons as individuals rather than as personified tribes. The prequel-like force of the scene is intact, either way.

<sup>371</sup> Amos (p. 268) also notes that v. 28 is the last appearance in Genesis of either ברך or ברכה, both of which have been thematic in Genesis. This similarly gives the verse climactic force.

concluding repetition of a speech formula whose locutionary meaning is redundant. The significance of the moment is emphasized by the use of formal or ritualistic language.

The second half of the verse, **וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כִּבְרַכְתּוּ בְּרַךְ אֹתָם**, consists of two clauses which are partially redundant.<sup>372</sup> The second clause expands the first without adding to it, once again elongating narrative time and freezing narrated time. These two clauses form a parallelistic sentence structure: *wayyiqtol* [predicate] // [adverbial clause] *qatal* [predicate]. This is poetic narrative such as one finds not infrequently in Genesis at the conclusions or climaxes of stories.<sup>373</sup> For example, this same poetic sentence structure is also found Genesis 1.27.<sup>374</sup>

<sup>372</sup> De Hoop (pp. 224–28, 232) divides v. 28 between **עָשָׂר** and **וַזָּאת** based on the MT accent markings. He then reads **וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם** as ‘when he blessed them.’ So also Skinner, p. 373; Wenham, II, 456; Hamilton, II, 687. But the syntactical analysis here is not sound. De Hoop (p. 226) identifies **וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם** as a ‘circumstantial clause’ and points to Joüon §159 for verification. Nothing in Joüon and Muraoka’s discussion, however, justifies rendering it as a circumstantial clause. Copulative circumstantial clauses are usually communicated in Biblical Hebrew by nominal clauses, **ו**-[subject] *qatal* or **ו**-[subject] *qotel* following either a *wayyiqtol* form or another nominal clause. De Hoop’s English translation is actually better understood as a temporal clause (Joüon §166), but here again the structure of his proposed v. 28bA finds no foundation. Temporal and circumstantial clauses are much more commonly associated with *qatal* forms than *wayyiqtol* forms (the main exception being **וַיְהִי** followed by infinitive + preposition **ל**). So if anything, the conventions of Biblical Hebrew would have the nominal clause **וַזָּאת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם** being the temporal clause, meaning ‘When this was what their father said to them, he blessed them.’ But this is less natural than connecting **וַזָּאת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לָהֶם** with the preceding clause. A better understanding of **וַיְבָרֶךְ**, and one consistent with my interpretation, is found in Joüon §118 *i*—the *wayyiqtol* used as a conclusion or summary, as in Gen 2.1; 23.20; Josh 10.40; I Sam 17.50. This would also mean that the division of the verse in the MT cantillation markings must be rejected here as an indicator of syntax.

<sup>373</sup> Poetry and rhetorical devices like chiasms have been observed as features especially characteristic of Priestly narrative style as opposed to Yahwistic style. See esp. McEvenue, pp. 27–36. Gen 49.28, or at least v. 28b, is typically understood to be Priestly. But note that this same sentence structure is also found in Gen 41.11, which is not a traditional P text. The integration of poetic elements into narrative seems to be a common element of Hebrew narrative style (showing that a hard theoretical division between poetry and prose is difficult to maintain).

<sup>374</sup> Appreciation of this verse as poetic is not as widespread as one might expect. However, see Dillmann, p. 32; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 1st Eng. edn. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), p. 57; perhaps also Delitzsch, p. 366 (‘es sind drei Sätze gleich einem Tripudium’). Many, like Norbert M. Samuelson, *The First Seven Days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis*, SFSHJ, 61 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), p. 127, note the parallelism if not the poetry; cf. König, p. 159. Matthews (I, 172) overstates the situation by calling it ‘an embedded poem’, appearing to infer some diachronic

ויברא אלהים את־האדם בצלמו / בצלם אלהים ברא אתו / זכר ונקבה ברא אתם:

This verse differs from Genesis 49.28b in adding the third phrase (which repeats the structure of the second while augmenting the meaning), but the nature of the parallelism is identical: an inverted structure using a morphological pair (ברך) with a contrast in aspect/tense.<sup>375</sup> Genesis 9.6a is another example, but one where the tense/aspect pairing, contrasting a Qal *qotel* of שפך with a Niphal *yiqtol* form of that same verb, highlights its future orientation (שפך דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך). Like these two verses (and others), Genesis 49.28b is poetic, and like the first two clauses of 1.27, the two clauses of 49.28b are mostly redundant.<sup>376</sup> The significance for the narrative is found in the poetic form itself, not in its locutionary force. By narrating

---

layering from the poetry. See also Gunkel, p. 102; Skinner, p. 33 ('may be a faint echo of an old hymn on the glory of man'). On the contrary, this kind of poetic parallelism is just as likely to be a part of the narrative style and original to this context. Arnold p. 29. In fact, Polak argues that the entirety of the first creation account should be read as poetry. Frank H. Polak, 'Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Gen. 1:1–2;3)', in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Reventlow and Yair Hoffmann, JSOTSup, 319 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2–31.

<sup>375</sup> The alternation between prefix and suffix forms (in either order) is a common feature of Hebrew parallelism, poetic or narrative (Gen 1.5; Exod 4.11; Lev 25.10 for other examples in narrative literature). Similar to this is the alternation in *binyan* (Gen 6.12, 7.23, 17.17; 1 Sam 1.28 in narrative). These sorts of alternation often accompany a reversal of sentence structure, as well. Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 35–40.

<sup>376</sup> Awareness of Gen 49.28's poetry is, if anything, less common than that of 1.27. Dillmann (p. 452) compares it with Gen 1.27 and 5.1 but does not specifically call it poetic. So also Delitzsch, p. 531. Matthews (II, 910) recognises it as poetic, but missing the comparison with 1.27's sentence structure he divides the half verse into three clauses rather than two: 'He blessed them, each one according to his blessing, he blessed them.' But this division is incompatible with the Hebrew (the middle clause is not a sentence unless it is a nominal: 'Each one was according to his blessing'). Comparison with 1.27 also argues against emending the text by moving the word אשר after בברכתו, as Wenham (II, 458) suggests. This correction makes the second clause dependent on the first: 'each according to the blessing by which he blessed them.' But if 49.28b is like 1.27, the second clause is independent: 'Each [איש אשר] according to his blessing he blessed them' or 'He blessed them each one according to his own blessing.' The איש אשר is unusual, but if an emendation is required (which is not certain) a better one is to correct to איש איש, as suggested by Delitzsch, p. 531; Dillmann, p. 452; Gunkel, p. 448; Procksch, p. 562; Westermann, III, 196. Many manuscripts and the MT Q reading correct II Sam 23.21 in just such a way; a potential correction of אשר to אש in Num 21.30, based on Gk. and Sam. versions, is also comparable. Brodie (p. 414) observes an 'echo here of the completing of creation', but he is referring primarily to verbal echoes with Gen 2.1 and 4.

the climax of the passage in poetic form, the narrator highlights the statement, pauses narrated time, and solemnises the moment.<sup>377</sup>

The elongation of narrative time also marks Genesis 49.28 as the end of this Episode. Especially disruptive shifts in narrative tempo in the form of ellipses mark the boundaries between the first and second Episodes and between the second and third Episodes. What follows in the fourth Episode appears to occur within the same basic time-frame (no ellipsis is implied), so here a particularly elongated pause interrupts the flow of narrated time to bring this Episode and its concerns to a close. This is appropriate. The aetiological gravity of this moment justifies giving the reader/listener (through a dramatic pause and the use of redundant poetic or ritualistic language) a chance to revel in the scene and absorb its significance.

### 4.3 THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE TWELVE AS WORTHY SUCCESSORS

Until Genesis 49.1 only Joseph (and to a lesser extent Manasseh and Ephraim) has been portrayed in the role of a Worthy Successor. The tendency (not the rule) in stories containing a Worthy Successor character is also to employ an Unworthy Competitor as a foil. This is true in the deaths of Abraham (Isaac versus the sons of Qeturah in Genesis 25.1–6), Isaac (Jacob versus Esau), David (Solomon versus Adonijah), and Elijah (Elisha versus the sons of the prophets). If the last two-thirds of I Samuel are regarded as a fragmented death-bed narrative, there are aspects of

---

<sup>377</sup> On embedded poetic elements in biblical narrative, Gordon notes: ‘When, therefore, an Old Testament narrative begins to lilt, exhibiting poetic structure and rhythm, we should not assume that we are reading (hearing) vestigial epic. What is more likely is that we have versifying in the strict sense, of prose tending to verse, in order to emphasise, formalise or heighten effect.’ Robert P. Gordon, ‘Simplicity of the Highest Cunning: Narrative Art in the Old Testament’, *SBET*, 6 (1988), 69–80 (p. 70). See also Kugel’s discussion of ‘seconding’ or parallelistic patterns for emphasis in prose as a ‘reflex of the language’. James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

Saul's and David's characterisations that point toward the roles of Unworthy Competitor and Worthy Successor, respectively.<sup>378</sup> On the other hand, the final addresses of Moses, Joshua, David (1 Chronicles), Mattathias, Tobit, and the Twelve Patriarchs deal exclusively with Successors rather than Competitors. In each case, the addressees are a group rather than an individual. The death of Elisha is unique in that it presents King Joash in an ambiguous role that matches neither the Worthy Successor nor the Unworthy Competitor, but ironically blends the two.

Reuben and Simeon, by their mention in Genesis 48.5, would appear to be consciously excluded from this honour and thereby characterized as Unworthy Competitors. This is, in fact, the expectation built by the structure of Genesis from its very beginning—the older is universally rejected in favour of the younger. The special blessing of Joseph in chapter 48 and the giving of executor responsibilities to him in 47.29–31 appear to confirm this expectation, but chapter 49 does something almost completely unprecedented in Genesis: all twelve sons are summoned into the privileged space of nearness to the death-bed. This positions all twelve sons as Worthy Successors.<sup>379</sup>

The closest corollary is Genesis 27.30–40, where Esau re-enters the privileged space after he has already lost the blessing. When Esau re-enters the scene, Isaac thinks he has already blessed Esau (so, in a sense, Esau enters without being summoned). Nothing was reserved in Isaac's blessing of Jacob, so what is given Esau is a kind of 'bottom-of-the-barrel' blessing. It is self-consciously inferior to the blessing given to Jacob. This confirms what the reader has expected since chapter 25: it was always a choice between Esau or Jacob, and Esau has been

---

<sup>378</sup> Specifically the spatial relationship of David and Saul to Samuel (1 Sam 15.35: 'Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death'; 1 Sam 19.18-24: David's flight to Samuel and Saul's inability to come close), and David's virtue (restraint and craftiness) versus Saul's vice (madness and rage).

<sup>379</sup> De Hoop, p. 319.



rejected. As confirmation of this rejection, after 27.40 Esau is not again depicted within the privileged space.<sup>380</sup>

Genesis 49 is a stark contrast with Esau's experiences. All the sons are present until Jacob dies; none of them are sent away (as an Unworthy Competitor would be). While some of the sayings in chapter 49, especially those pertaining to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, are negative and imply some kind of rejection, the overall effect of verses 1–28 is to treat the twelve sons, including Joseph as one rather than two, as a unit—the twelve tribes of Israel. What is spoken over them is mixed, but it is characterized on the whole as a blessing in verse 28.<sup>381</sup> Unlike the situation in

---

<sup>380</sup> The recurring detail in Genesis where Abraham and Isaac are buried by their two sons (Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau) does not counteract the symbolism of the privileged space. The burials occur after the death of the patriarch, and the significance of the space is that it is where the dying character makes his will known and effective.

<sup>381</sup> Some older commentators saw diachronic unevenness in the perceived inappropriateness of the words *ברך* and *ברכה* in Gen 49.28b to describe some of the oracles of 49.2–27. Cf. Dillmann, p. 452, who also refers on this point back to Knobel; more recently, Schmitt, p. 73 (n. 305). There remains even in some modern commentators a lack of ease with the word, if not a readiness to make diachronic use of it (Wenham, II, 468). However, what other word could be used in place of *ברך* that would be more appropriate? Considering some of the sayings in ch. 49 are positive, some negative, and some seem rather neutral, the narrator could be simply averaging out the overall quality of the statements and referring to the collection as a corporate 'blessing' (Waltke, p. 615). It is worth remembering that what Isaac spoke over Esau in ch. 27.39–40 is also implicitly regarded as a blessing (so there is room in *ברך* for less than ideal oracular blessing statements). Furthermore, the narrator expresses an awareness that not all the blessings are equal (hence the *איש אשר כברכתו*). Regardless, in a sense the narrator tells us in v. 28, 'Think as I say, not as it reads.' (Brodie, p. 407; Coats (p. 302) writes, 'V. 28 rounds off the sayings collection with a commentary defining the collection as a whole as a blessing of the father for his sons'). The implied reader has two options: either (1) accept the evaluation expressed by the narrator, or (2) read into the setting some kind of irony (which would come across rhetorically as anti-Reuben/Simeon/Levi?). Are we correct in understanding *ברך* necessarily to have a positive connotation? Speiser (pp. 351, 375) and BDB (p. 139) speak of a lighter 'salutation' use of the word with numerous examples, including Gen 47.10. It is important to distinguish contexts and the meanings groups of words create together from the semantic content each word can potentially bring to a situation. Just because 'blessings' tend to occur in farewell scenarios does not mean that *ברך* contributes the idea of 'farewell' to a context. Admittedly, some instances blend the two semantic fields in such a way as to suggest this. For example see I Sam 25.14, which is, however, a reference back to 25.6, where not just a greeting but a blessing does occur. The euphemistic usage as found in I Kgs 21.10, Job 1.5, and Ps 10.3 must mean 'curse' rather than 'bless', but, as in English, this usage is an intentional flouting of Grice's Maxim of Quality, and it is precisely because *ברך* does not mean 'curse' independently that it can function as a euphemism (in place of, e.g., *קלל*). The context in 49.28 does not provide enough clues to project a partially euphemistic understanding onto its use of *ברך*, unless, of course, one wishes to argue that it is ironic (for which

Genesis 27, the story does not imply that Joseph has received a blessing in chapter 48 of which Jacob only has one to give (other than the double-portion aspect).<sup>382</sup> Also, the inclusion of Joseph as one of the addressees in 49.22–26 would be odd if the overall intent was to distinguish between Joseph and the other eleven, especially since Judah, too, has received a lengthy and overwhelmingly positive blessing.<sup>383</sup>

This implementation of the conventions of the Worthy Successor, then, has two notable features: a corporate Successor and a tiered Succession. Both features are found in other death-bed stories. First, while Worthy Successors are commonly a single individual as opposed to some other individual, one finds a corporate Worthy Successor in the death-bed stories of Joseph (his kinsmen/the sons of Israel are the addressees), Moses (all Israelites are addressed by Moses in Deuteronomy 31–33; they all mourn his death), Joshua (all Israelites are addressed), the *Testaments of the*

---

argument one would need more evidence of irony in the surrounding narratives to establish it as thematic; such evidence is lacking, in my opinion). Note also that each occurrence of the euphemistic use is directed toward God, not other humans. Finally, the explicit use of the word בִּרְכָה would seem to push this occurrence strongly toward the non-ironic, non-salutation, benedictory side of its semantic range.

<sup>382</sup> De Hoop (p. 360) observes, ‘The fact that all twelve sons are addressed by their own names makes the idea of a mistakenly given blessing (Genesis 27) impossible.’ The blessings in Gen 49 are all allocated intentionally, whereas in Gen 27 the blessing is not. This implies that Isaac had no blessing in mind for Jacob. No explanation is given why this is, but Isaac never considers that the Patriarchal Promise could be inherited by both of his sons. Only the oracle of 25.23 hints that only one son will inherit the Promise, and Gen 27 interprets the entire Promise as the first-born blessing. On the other hand, no oracle or theophany ever asserts or even implies that only one of Jacob’s sons will inherit the Promise. The first-born blessing becomes, then, about pre-eminence and a double portion of descendants and land. This fluidity in the meaning of a first-born blessing is only explained by reading the text aetiologically: what is true at the time of the implied reader is projected back on history without any speculation whether things could have been different.

<sup>383</sup> The prominence of the Judah and Joseph blessings in ch. 49 and his own two-layer pro-Judah/pro-Joseph diachronic theory of the Joseph story leads de Hoop (p. 359) to downplay somewhat the significance of all twelve sons being present and specifically addressed. According to de Hoop, the main function of the Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, and Benjamin blessings being simply ‘to complete the number of the twelve tribes in the Blessing of the patriarch.’ Certainly, the future orientation of the blessings dictates that Judah and the Joseph tribes should have the most impressive blessing, since their position and power was to become the greatest among the tribes. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that no son is excluded from the blessing: all are recipients of the Patriarchal Promise.

*Twelve Patriarchs* (addressees are always implied to be a group rather than an individual) and Mattathias in I Maccabees (all sons are addressed). Second, the tiered aspect, where some among a group of Successors are differentiated somehow, is also found in the deaths of Moses (Joshua is his Successor in a leadership sense, while all of Israel are his religious Successors) and of Mattathias (Simeon and Judas are singled out as leaders). The death of Jacob uniquely and cleverly implements such a tiered Succession. The story plays on the pattern in Genesis of the reversal of primogeniture by finally breaking from the pattern. Instead of being rejected, the eleven sons are blessed alongside Joseph.

The movement of the death-bed story from Joseph as sole addressee to all twelve as common addressees supports the above conclusion by making the corporate aspect of the succession a qualifier for the tiered aspect. It enables the climactic moment of Genesis to be located within the part of the story pertaining to the twelve without that moment subsequently being outshone by the selection of Joseph. Had the Joseph sections followed the sections relating to all twelve, it seems to me that the prominence of Joseph in the story would have been even more pronounced. Consider, in comparison, the organization of Isaac's death-bed story, the Testament part of which is divided into two Episodes: Genesis 27.1–40 and

27.41–28.9.<sup>384</sup> Jacob's solo blessing coming second confirms his preeminent status, even if it was stolen.

In short, the summoning of all twelve sons (including Joseph), the mixed but overall positive intent of the 'blessing', and the treatment of the twelve as a unit suggest that, unlike any previous situation in Genesis, all twelve sons are full recipients of the Patriarchal Promise—Worthy co-Successors, with Joseph being designated as the first among equals. This is confirmed in the fourth Episode when the burial request is repeated to all twelve sons, making them in some way all responsible as executors of Jacob's will (with Joseph having primary responsibility).

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In this short chapter I have argued (1) that the narrative framework of Jacob's Blessing in Genesis 49.1–28 is conventionally shaped, and (2) that an understanding of the appropriate narrative conventions shows the framework and the oracle to be more seamlessly integrated than has often been recognized. Genesis 49.1 contains no feature that can be used for diachronic investigation, including the personal name 'Jacob.' Verse 28, taken as a whole (regardless of its possible diachronic division)

---

<sup>384</sup> This is not the appropriate context to go into this division of the story in detail, but despite the very common division of the story between 27.45 and 27.46, which is based on older source-critical boundaries but is maintained more or less even in more recent final-form-oriented commentaries (Hamilton, II, 233; Amos, p. 170–180; Arnold, pp. 241–44, and Matthews, II, 423–41, follow the chapter divisions, which relate more closely to the old source-critical divisions), the greater weight of parallel structure is to be found in my division of the text between 27.40 and 27.41 (so also Delitzsch, pp. 366–76, despite his admission of a source-critical distinction between vv. 45 and 46). Note the common pattern of (1) Isaac's/Esau's plot, (2) which is overheard by Rebekah, (3) who then counterplots with Jacob (4) and manipulates Isaac (either through outright deception or misdirection) (5) to bless Jacob and/or send him away, (6) after which Esau attempts to get a blessing or obey the orders given to Jacob. I also do not find the structural analysis based strictly on character pairings (Fokkelman, p. 98; Cotter, pp. 196–206; Janzen, p. 103; Waltke, pp. 373–83;) to be entirely satisfying, given that it tends to ignore the places where Esau acts alone (27.41 and 28.6–9). Wenham's discussion of the form of the section (II, 202–4) is well done, but he does not decisively break from either the older source-critical division or from the more recent dialogue-based structural schema following Fokkelman (*Narrative Art in Genesis*, pp. 93–104).

functions as a colophon for the preceding oracles and, indeed, as the climax for the book of Genesis. It is fundamentally an aetiological moment showing the emergence of the twelve tribes as such. Moreover, the characterization of the twelve sons of Jacob in chapter 49 follows the pattern of the Worthy Successor, despite the fact that Joseph has already been designated the recipient of the birthright. All twelve sons are Jacob's Worthy Successors, with Joseph being the first among equals, a corporate and tiered succession also found in the death-bed stories of Moses, Joshua, and Mattathias, and in the *Testaments and of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Having been so designated, the sons are prepared to be given executor duties in the fourth and final Episode.

# 5 THE BURIAL REQUEST TO THE TWELVE

---

*Genesis 49.29–33*

## 5.0 TEXT AND PRELIMINARY REMARKS

29 ויצו אותם ויאמר אלהם אני נאסף אל-עמי<sup>385</sup> קברו אתי אל<sup>386</sup>-אבתי אל-המערה אשר בשדה עפרון החתי: 30 במערה אשר בשדה המכפלה אשר על-פני-ממרא בארץ כנען אשר קנה אברהם את-השדה מאת עפרן החתי לאחוזת-קבר: 31 שמה קברו את-אברהם ואת שרה אשתו שמה קברו את-יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו ושמה קברתי את-לאה: 32 מקנה השדה והמערה אשר-בו מאת בני-חת: 33 ויכל יעקב לצות את-בניו ויאסף רגליו אל-המטה ויגוע ויאסף אל-עמיו:

29 He commanded them and said to them, 'I am about to be added to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the tomb which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the tomb which is in the field of Machpelah which is near Mamre in the land of Canaan, the field which Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite as a burial property 31 (there they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah). 32 A purchased possession is the field and the tomb that is in it from the sons of Heth.' 33 Then Jacob finished commanding his sons, pulled up his feet into the bed and expired, and he was added to his people.

Genesis 49.29–33 is the fourth and final Episode of Jacob's death-bed story (by which I mean the fourth and final Testament-containing narrative unit). Genesis 50, while belonging to Jacob's death-bed story, belongs in a different way that will be discussed in the following chapter. This Episode once again sees Jacob issuing burial instructions, but this time in an undifferentiated manner to all twelve sons. Its

---

<sup>385</sup> The MT vocalization of עמי makes this a singular. If this is correct, it would be the only time the singular of עם + pronominal suffix occurs in this phrase in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gen 25.8, 17; 35.29; 49.33; Num 20.24; 27.13; 31.2; twice in Deut 32.50).

<sup>386</sup> The preposition אל does seem a bit odd here, as noted in the *BHS* apparatus. The sense of the sentence is unmistakable, but this could be a mistaken replacement of עם based on אל-עמי/עמי four words earlier and at the end of v. 33 (cf. also 47.30).

structure and features, like those of the preceding three Episodes, show conventional shaping, both in itself and in its integration into the larger death-bed story.

Genesis 49.29–33 is, with some exceptions,<sup>387</sup> treated as a unity. Because of its typical attribution to P, it is sometimes treated as a unit with the second half of verse 28,<sup>388</sup> but the introduction of new subject matter (accompanied by a reiteration of an approaching death motif), the fact that ברכה in 49.28 must be referring to what precedes it, and the narrative pause of verse 28 all point to a narrative boundary between 49.28 and 49.29, albeit a light one. The attribution of this unit to P, while common, is not certain. Such attribution is based largely upon its affinity with Genesis 23, but the attribution to P of the relevant sections of chapter 23 is itself highly questionable.<sup>389</sup> To argue for P based on the phrasing of the death notice is insufficient.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, any diachronic distinction within Genesis 49.29–33 must

---

<sup>387</sup> Rendtorff (*Problem*, p. 162) treats vv. 29–32 as a layer of later reworking that has separated vv. 28b and 33, which were originally adjacent. Numerous other suggestions have been made, the enumeration of which is not important for the present context. For a summary and evaluation of diachronic research of Gen 47.28–49.33, see de Hoop, pp. 366–450. De Hoop himself (pp. 565–67) sees 49.29–33aA as part of his ‘pro-Judah’ layer, while 49.33aB–b is part of his ‘pro-Joseph’ layer.

<sup>388</sup> Westermann, III, 220–29. The layout of Hamilton’s discussion (II, 687–89) does not really follow its content: the layout connects v. 28 with vv. 29–33 as the unit, but his discussion connects v. 28 with the preceding verses.

<sup>389</sup> Older commentators assigned Genesis 23 to P on stylistic grounds. Dillmann, p. 279; Gunkel, p. 249; Skinner, p. 335. But more recent work finds a stylistic basis unlikely. See Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 154–56; McEvenue, p. 22; Wenham, II, 124–5. Even those who assign the passage to P note its contrast with typical P material, like von Rad (p. 249), who suggests that Genesis 23 is an older story inserted pretty much unchanged into P (‘against his usual practice’). See also Noth, pp. 14, 110; Carr, pp. 111–12; similarly Blum, pp. 441–46. The attribution to P, then, rests apparently on the introductory vv. 1–2 (cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 173), but this same logic cannot be used to argue for the attribution of the Gen 2 creation account to P based upon 2.4a (which, based on the usage of the *Toledot* formula everywhere else it is used, must be an introduction for what comes after and not a colophon for Gen 1.1–2.3). Skinner attributes the whole of ch. 23 to P while acknowledging some problems with its style. His attribution is additionally based on its similarity with supposedly indisputable parts of P, meaning 25.9–10, 49.29–33, and 50.13 (cf. also Westermann, II, 456). But the attribution of 49.29–33 and 50.13 to P is itself based upon their affinity with ch. 23 (as is 25.9–10, in part), so the reasoning is entirely circular (Blum, pp. 444–45).

<sup>390</sup> The logical circularity of attributing to P concern for chronological data as a stylistic feature and then assigning texts containing chronological data to P primarily on those grounds should be self-evident. Similarities in phrasing of formal events like death and burial could easily be based on

be based upon the characteristics and seams of this text alone. However, once the passage is treated on its own minute differentiation becomes difficult to maintain. Its synchronic unity, both within itself and as a part of the larger death-bed story, becomes very apparent.

This Episode is compact, like Genesis 47.28–31, meaning there are minimal elements that do not find some close corollary in other death-bed Episodes. It consists of a simple Preparation (49.29a), a Testament with a single theme and addressee (49.29b–32—burial instructions given to the twelve sons as a corporate character), and a Denouement (49.33, but it actually includes all of Genesis 50—more on this below and in the next chapter).

## 5.1 THE PREPARATION (GENESIS 49.29A)

Genesis 49.29a consists of a variant of the summoning/speech formula. The verb צוה as a summoning/speech motif in death-bed contexts is also found 1 Kings 2.1. The verb is very common in Deuteronomy (which is in one sense entirely a death-bed context<sup>391</sup>), occurring nine times in chapters 31–34 (which contain the death-bed story proper, as I understand it). The command motif also appears in various Greek words (ἐντέλλομαι and ἐπιτάσσω, for example) in Tobit and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.<sup>392</sup> Over half of the verb's total occurrences in the MT are found in

---

narrative conventions that transcend the P document, and we do not have enough non-P death notices for an effective comparison (as death notices in Genesis are usually attributed to P, as well; much of the recurring phrasing is also found in death notices outside Genesis, e.g. 1 Kgs 2.10; Job 42.17). Furthermore, McEvenue (p. 22) has pointed out the problems of dealing with P as a stylistic monolith and the possibility that sources might be discernible even within P (cf. also Noth, pp. 11–12). In such an environment, attribution to P of very small units of text becomes highly problematic.

<sup>391</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

<sup>392</sup> Specifically the codex Sinaiticus reading of Tob 14.3. The command motif is especially prominent in *T. 12 Patr.*, occurring throughout the scenes: (1) in the introduction to the death-bed story (*T. Reu.* 1.1; *T. Benj.* 1.1); (2) in the speech introduction (*T. Ash.* 8.1); (3) within the Testament (*T. Reu.* 1.6, 4.6, 6.7; *T. Sim.* 7.3; *T. Levi* 10.1, 13.1; *T. Jud.* 13.1, 17.1, 21.1; *T. Zeb.* 10.2; *T. Benj.* 12.1); (4) in the



the Pentateuch, and the vast majority of these are in legal contexts. This may indicate that, in addition to its function as a standard everyday word for an utterance with imperative force, צוה appears to have a specific legal specialization, especially in the Pentateuch.<sup>393</sup> In other words, in keeping with the death-bed story as a narrative context for the legal validation of various concerns, the use of צוה (as opposed to simply אמר, for example) communicates an official potency to the burial request, a special legal bindingness.<sup>394</sup> A comparable example in English would be the use of the word ‘order’ in ‘court order’ as opposed to ‘restaurant order.’ Both signify an

---

conclusion of the Testament (*T. Reu.* 7.1; *T. Sim.* 8.1; *T. Levi* 19.4; *T. Jud.* 26.4; *T. Iss.* 7.8; *T. Naph.* 9.3; *T. Ash.* 8.2). These examples only count those instances of ‘command’ language where the dying patriarch is commanding his descendants (it does not include mentions of the commandments of the Lord).

<sup>393</sup> Without either direct access to native speakers or to a wider set of texts, the reliability of any attribution of technical or specialized markedness to words or phrases in Biblical Hebrew is questionable. Linguists have identified numerous characteristics of specialized discourse, all of which have subsequently been called into question. See Maurizio Gotti, *Investigating Specialized Discourse*, 2nd rev. edn (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 33–66, for a discussion of commonly ascribed lexical characteristics of specialized language and their limitations. Acknowledging the insufficiency of my treatment of specialization, I suspect a term of belonging to a technical register when it is common and consistent in a certain kind of context. In other words, in a context (for example laws and contracts, for example), if a word tends to show up more frequently than it does outside of that context, and if that word is more or less consistent in its use in that context, and if it has a minimum of synonyms in those contexts, that word is very possibly a technical term for that context. These criteria relate to the qualities of monoreferentiality, precision, and conciseness, as mentioned by Gotti.

Note, in response to B. J. van der Merwe (221–32 (p. 225, n. 3)), that the lack of specialised legal vocabulary in a death-bed story does not make it less a context for ritual or legal validation. On the contrary, the legal/ritual context makes specialised legal vocabulary especially appropriate. So the absence of צוה from Gen 47.29–31, for example, does not mean that this it is not part of a death-bed testament.

<sup>394</sup> That צוה can, in legal contexts, take on specialisation expressing legally binding mandates is verified by the development of post-biblical Hebrew צוואה ‘last will and testament.’ Based upon a study of Greek legal terminology, A. Pelletier, ‘L’autorité divine d’après le pentateuque grec’, *VT*, 32 (1982), 236–42 (p. 240), suggests that the Gr. translation of צוה in 49.33 (the word in 49.29 remains untranslated) as ἐπιτάσσω (unique in the Pentateuch) may indicate that the translator understood a greater irrevocability in Jacob’s command here. So also Hamilton, II, 688 (n. 6). However, though most other instances of צוה in the Pentateuch are translated by ἐντέλλομαι, these other instances can hardly be thought to be less binding. The most that one can say here is that the translator may have perceived a legal-specialised nuance in the use of the verb.

imperative, but the former is a legally binding imperative by virtue of its legal context.

Like the absence of any Preparation in the previous Episode, the brevity of the Preparation reveals the Episode's dependence on preceding texts to establish the chronological and locational setting. It is possible to locate such a text in 47.28. Ignoring the proposed P texts in 48.3–6/7 and 49.1, 28b, Genesis 49.29–33 reads reasonably well following onto 47.28. Perhaps adding 49.1 and 28b maintains a passable text. However, once one includes 48.3–6/7, the reconstructed P text begins looking suspicious and at least as capable of diachronic division into previously existing traditions as the final form.<sup>395</sup> In order for the proposed P narrative to be at all feasible, it would need to be clearly superior as a seamless narrative to what we have in the final form, and this is, in my opinion, not the case. But the proposal of a once independent P narrative runs into significant problems regardless of the few problems the hypothesis seems to solve. Instead, it is at least as plausible if not better to understand the role of P (assuming these texts can be assigned to the same point of origin) to be that of a redactor and augments. Therefore, whoever put the present text together did so in an intentional way that was informed by the conventions of the Hebrew death-bed story.

## 5.2 THE TESTAMENT (GENESIS 49.29B–32)

In verse 29b, Jacob begins his final Testament by announcing his approaching death with a phrase used only here and in Deuteronomy 32.50 (Niphal **אָסַף** followed by **אֶל עַמִּי**). Once again, what unifies specific type-scene elements is not so much precise

---

<sup>395</sup> For example, the change in addressee from Joseph to 'his sons', the rejection of Reuben and Simeon in 48.3–6 forgotten and followed by the sudden disappearance of Manasseh and Ephraim from the scene in 49.1. The sudden occurrence of **וַיֹּאמֶר** in 48.3 with no further segue does seem abrupt, but it is essentially the same structure as what one finds in 50.24. Interestingly, virtually no one assigns 50.22–26 to P.

wording or placement as a common illocutionary force and an elastic tendency to occur in certain places.<sup>396</sup> Therefore, the fact that this idiom occurs rarely in approaching-death notices but more commonly in death-notices spoken by the narrator (including verse 33) simply illustrates the flexibility of the Hebrew death-bed story.

The theme of the Testament is a second burial request. Structurally, this burial request fills out the overall chiasmic form of the final form, balancing the first burial request as the Worthy Successor blessing of 49.1–28 balanced out that of 48.1–22. The two Episodes are not simply twins, however. There are noteworthy differences in their respective content.<sup>397</sup> This burial request, as opposed to the first one, reveals a concern for due process.<sup>398</sup> Jacob appeals to the tradition, and more importantly, the wording of Abraham's purchase of the tomb of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite narrated in Genesis 23, a story whose primary purpose is to provide a partial legal justification for Israel's claim to a right to the land of Canaan.<sup>399</sup> This burial request differs from the one in 47.29–31 in its concern with

---

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Propp's assertion (p. 67) that functions should be categorized by their effect on the plot, not by their surface content.

<sup>397</sup> How and to what extent one should read into the presence of two burial requests is a subtle question. I feel that Pirson (p. 123) takes the wrong approach. For Pirson, the presence of a second burial request implies some kind of deficiency in the first: either Jacob is not confident in Joseph's faithfulness, or he is accounting for Joseph's lack of knowledge (i.e. the specific whereabouts of Machpelah). The mere existence of a second burial request need not imply any such deficiency in the first, however. Once again, I find that synchronic commentators are too quick to infer negative things into Hebrew narrative (which already has its fair share of intrigue), here into a repetition as elsewhere into gaps. The fact that suspicion, feuds, lies, etc. are read into both gaps and repetitions (which are essentially opposites) shows that these things derive from the reader more than from the text itself.

<sup>398</sup> Westermann, III, 223–24.

<sup>399</sup> Gen 23 is form-critically identified as an example of commercial procedural law. James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis*, JSOTSup, 335 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 14–15. See Manfred R. Lehmann, 'Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law', *BASOR*, 129 (1953), 15–18, for the chapter's possible relationship to Hittite law. Gene M. Tucker, 'The Legal Background of Genesis 23', *JBL*, 85 (1966), 77–84, locates its legal conventions more generally in the ancient Near Eastern legal tradition, including some parallels with Neo-Babylonian practice. Thompson, pp. 295–9, likewise cautions against using similarities with ancient Near Eastern sale contracts for dating purposes. Concerning the

legal precision, evidenced by the level of detail in the request, the degree of repetitiveness, and the presence of certain specialised terms like <sup>400</sup>אחזה and <sup>401</sup>מקנה, showing that the narrator and Jacob (the two are essentially identical at this point) are concerned with the legitimacy of Jacob's claim to the land.

---

story's function in Genesis of legitimating the purchase of the cave and the Israelite claim to the land, see Carr, pp. 111–12; Blum, pp. 441–6. The Israelites are self-consciously not indigenous to Canaan, making the legality of the purchase all the more important as a basis for their claim to the land. De Hoop, p. 361. On a side note, to call Gen 23 aetiological (as Gunkel, p. 250) seems imprecise. The concern is not so much to explain some unusual phenomenon or circumstance in the implied reader's present as to preserve a record of a legal transaction, the validity of which is of present importance to the implied reader. In other words, it is not so much answering the question 'Why is the tomb of Abraham at Machpelah?' as it is the question 'What right do we have to possess the land of Canaan?' If this is aetiological, it is not so in the same sense as, say, Gen 9.13–16; 28.18–22; 32.1–2; 32.32; 48.

<sup>400</sup> In the semantic field of inheritance or property, the most common is נחלה, but other nouns include חלקה, חלק, ירשה, and, of course, אחזה. The proportion of occurrences of these five nouns (in alphabetical order) throughout the Hebrew Bible is 66:66:23:14:222, meaning נחלה is by far the most common. These words are not synonymous. In particular, חלק and חלקה, which connote division or a pie-piece conceptualization, are the least similar to the other three nouns. The noun ירשה, the nominal counterpart for the most common verb in this semantic field, ירש, is the least common of the five and is primarily found by itself in Deuteronomistic texts. The remaining two nouns sometimes occur in parallel construction, and no underlying connotative difference (at least of any consistency) is discernible. In Genesis, the proportion of these five nouns alters dramatically—9:3:1:0:2. The otherwise dominant נחלה all but disappears, and אחזה is three times as common as the next most common noun in this category. In other words, אחזה is notably prominent in Genesis. All of this suggests that אחזה is in some way a marked term, but its markedness is not in its surface meaning, but in its nuance. Other places where אחזה occurs as often or more often than נחלה include Lev and Ezek. Its prominence in Lev may argue for the word having a legal or theological specialization. Otherwise, it may be an archaic term especially connotative of the patriarchal legends (this, especially, seems plausible in its use in Ezek 44–48, where the two nouns are used with no possible distinction in meaning, and where the text is concerned with some kind of cultic restoration—archaic terms might lend the text a kind of ancient authority). In short, in Genesis אחזה is thematic and a marked term. It seems especially connected to the patriarchal stories and may, therefore, have some kind of intuitive theological or legal significance.

<sup>401</sup> The vocalization מִקְנָה, with which the word in 49.32 arguably should be identified despite its own aberrant vocalization, only occurs in the Hebrew Bible fifteen times (sixteen, counting 49.32). All of these are legal contexts—either in prescriptive law (Exod 12.44; Lev 25.16 (x2), 51; 27.22) or in narrative references to legal documents or transactions (the occurrences in Genesis and Jeremiah). Every instance refers either to a purchased possession or to a possession's purchase price. The rarity of the word, the consistency of its context (its legal register), and the specificity of word's meaning (without even parallel synonyms) all argue that מִקְנָה is a specialized legal term.

Genesis 49.32, which is felt by some commentators to be an awkward and unnecessary insertion that essentially repeats verse 30,<sup>402</sup> is best understood as an emphatic nominal sentence<sup>403</sup> that repeats the conclusion of Genesis 23's legal proceedings in 23.17–18 and means: 'A purchased possession are the field and the cave in it from the sons of Heth.'<sup>404</sup> The reason מְקִנָּה would be emphasized is because it is specialized: a legally specific category.

### 5.3 THE DENOUEMENT (GENESIS 49.33)

The formal conclusion of the Testament in Genesis 49.33 ('Jacob finished commanding his sons') is a feature unique among Biblical death-bed stories, but something like it concludes every one of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.<sup>405</sup> As mentioned in chapter 3, feet and beds are common related motifs in death-bed stories, so the drawing up of Jacob's feet into his bed would likely be a familiar story element for the implied reader, despite its uniqueness in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>406</sup>

---

<sup>402</sup> Westermann (III, 224) for example, says, 'V. 32 ist nur eine Wiederholung, ein falschem Ort eingefügt; sie müßte über V. 31 hinweg an V. 30 anschließen ... Der Vers macht den Eindruck eines nachträglichen Zusatzes.' Westermann notes the general repetitiveness of vv. 29–33, judging it difficult to tell 'ob die Wiederholung beabsichtigt ist oder der Text nachträglich glossiert' (III, 223). More recently, the verse has been virtually ignored. Matthews (II, 914) treats the repetition simply as an inclusio. Hamilton (II, 688) only notes the verse in a text critical footnote concerning the word מְרִנָּה. Wenham's commentary contains not a single comment on the verse except where it is included in a group of verses. This is also (more understandably) true of most smaller commentaries.

<sup>403</sup> The fronting of the descriptive predicate is for emphasis. See Joüon §154 *h*. Cf. Gen 43.32b.

<sup>404</sup> The vocalisation of מְקִנָּה is problematic, but it is best read as the same word found in 23.18, מְקִנָּה, a purchased possession. It is not a const. connected to הַשְׂדֵּה as Hamilton's translation requires, so his suggested correction is unnecessary.

<sup>405</sup> *T. Reu.* 7.1; *T. Sim.* 9.1; *T. Levi* 19.4; *T. Jud.* 26.4; *T. Iss.* 7.8; *T. Zeb.* 10.6–7; *T. Dan* 7.1; *T. Naph.* 9.1; *T. Gad* 8.3; *T. Ash.* 8.1; *T. Jos.* 20.4; *T. Benj.* 12.1;

<sup>406</sup> *T. Gad* 8.4 even has Gad draw up his feet like Jacob does in 49.33, rather than stretch them out as in *T. Levi*, *T. Iss.* and *T. Jos.* Van Seters (pp. 322–23) understands the phrase in v. 33 to be looking back to 48.2 as a kind of inclusio that ties together all of ch. 48–49. See also de Hoop, p. 361.

Jacob's death consists of two distinct phrases, neither of which are מות. The verb גוע is comparatively rare,<sup>407</sup> but its meaning cannot be reliably distinguished from מות.<sup>408</sup> The second phrase, אסף אל עם, occurs five times outside of Genesis (in various *binyanim*, moods, and persons),<sup>409</sup> while אסף אל with some other object (אבו ת or קבר) occurs five more times.<sup>410</sup> The verb אסף by itself acts as an idiom for death three times, including once for animals.<sup>411</sup> Regardless of the phrase's exact form, in every case that it occurs in narrative literature it connotes a peaceful death. Both of these phrases also occur in the deaths of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac in 25.8, 25.17 and 35.29, but in each case with וימת between the phrases. Jacob's death lacks וימת, but this, too, is not unique among death-bed stories. David's death is related simply with וישכב דוד עם־אבתיו, one of most common euphemisms for death in Kings and Chronicles (and found elsewhere only in II Sam 7.12), and the phrase generally excludes וימת.<sup>412</sup>

Because these seemingly synonymous phrases (מות, גוע, אסף אל עמיו) are found right next to each other (and because this stacking-of-phrases phenomenon is not so common outside of Genesis), there have been some attempts at distinguishing meanings in these death idioms, usually in an attempt to reconstruct ancient Israelite

---

<sup>407</sup> The Hebrew Bible contains only one non-poetic occurrence outside of Genesis and Numbers.

<sup>408</sup> Despite the commonly expressed thought that גוע more specifically means 'to breathe ones last breath' or 'to expire' (see BDB), *HALOT* gives no etymological evidence for this (the Arabic cognate means 'to be empty, hungry', but this by itself does not lead to any breath-related semantic field), and I can find no instance of the verb that works better in its context by being anything other than a synonym for מות. Admittedly, it is better to work under the assumption that there are no such things as perfect synonyms, but I see no justification for imposing 'breath' imagery onto the verb. It seems to be as synonymous to מות as 'perish' is to 'die', making its semantic distinction from מות one of register.

<sup>409</sup> Num 20.24; 27.13; 31.2; Deut 32.50 x 2.

<sup>410</sup> Judg 2.10; II Kgs 22.20 x 2 // II Chr 34.28 x 2.

<sup>411</sup> Num 20.26; 27.13; Hos 4.3; perhaps also in the background in Joel 2.10 with regard to stars.

<sup>412</sup> The phrase וישכב עם־אבתיו, though euphemistic, does not, however, necessarily connote a peaceful or noble death—it is used of Ahab, for example, in II Kgs 22.40, who dies a violent death in battle and is clearly not favoured by God.

beliefs about the afterlife.<sup>413</sup> These efforts are largely unconvincing. The fluidity and interchangeability of idiomatic death phrases point toward essential synonymy. The reason for piling up synonymous phrases at a moment like the death of a major character is not to be found in subtle distinctions of meaning, but in the solemnity of the moment and the need to reflect that solemnity through formalised language.<sup>414</sup>

When a death-bed story includes an Epilogue at the end of the final Testament, the death of a character is actually movable depending on the needs of the plot. It usually occurs before the Epilogue. In the case of Jacob's death-bed story, his death in 49.33 concludes his last Testament very naturally, and the Epilogue material (chapter 50) is concerned, at least in part, with things which must happen posthumously (like burial). The death of David in 1 Kings 2 is likewise followed by a series of related stories. The main exception is the death of Isaac which is very close to the last element in what can be called his death-bed story (where 28.10–35.22b is framed by Isaac's death-bed story and is interpreted thereby as its Epilogue).<sup>415</sup> Epilogues will be more fully discussed in the following chapter.

Descriptively, a few things can be said about the existence and placement of death notices in death-bed stories. First, as a rule there is always a death notice in a conventional death-bed story.<sup>416</sup> I have found two exceptions to this rule. The first is the story of the miraculous recovery of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20 that plays upon the

---

<sup>413</sup> Dillmann, p. 293; B. Jacob, p. 165; Sarna, p. 174; Hamilton, II, 168; Waltke, p. 340–41; Hartley, p. 231. Hamilton incorrectly cites Westermann on this (although Westermann himself may be inappropriately citing B. Jacob in support of his own view). Westermann (II, 486), in fact, views the phrase as more connected with the survival of the dying person's memory among those still living. Both B. Jacob and Hamilton see the focus of the phrase being on the survival of the deceased individual in some other form of existence.

<sup>414</sup> Arnold (p. 226) has essentially the same view as I do.

<sup>415</sup> The deaths of Elijah, Elisha, and Tobit also precede their Epilogues. The death-bed stories of Abraham, David, Moses, and Joshua have Epilogues belonging to more than one Episode, but in all four of them their death is followed by a bit more Epilogue material.

<sup>416</sup> Though not necessarily at the end of every death-bed stock situation if there is no typical narrative framing. For example, see 2 Sam 23.1–7.

expectations formed by the conventions of the death-bed story. The second is the ‘death-bed’ story of Elijah in II Kgs 2, where Elijah functionally ‘dies’ albeit in a miraculous and glorious way. I have yet to discover a conventional Hebrew death-bed story wherein the death of the dying character is merely implied. Second, there is always only one death notice. If the final redactor has taken multiple death-bed stories and fused them into a single whole, he has eliminated all but one death notice. Third, the death notice occurs in the final Episode of multi-Episode death-bed stories. No death-bed story narrates a death-bed Testament, the character’s death, and then another Testament anaeleptically.

All twelve sons are again depicted as corporate addressees to whom Jacob is now giving duties as executors of his will. This portrays them all as Worthy co-Successors even more equally than 49.1–28 (where there is still some gradation). As the following burial narrative confirms, Joseph is still first among equals (largely because of his powerful political position), but all twelve are involved in the burial at the climactic moment in the burial narrative. None are excluded from the blessings or responsibilities of Succession. This second burial request, then, both chiastically balances 47.29–31 and raises the status of the other eleven sons to equality with Joseph in at least some respect.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

The fourth Episode of Jacob’s death-bed story is brief but thoroughly shaped by convention. The Preparation (49.29a) is a command motif (a variant within the larger category of speech/summoning motifs). The Testament (49.29b–32) recalls Abraham’s purchase of the cave and field at Machpelah within the context of a repeated burial request. Its repetitiveness and careful attention to phrasing show it to be concerned with legal propriety. All twelve sons are commonly addressed and



given the executor duty of burial, characterizing them as Worthy co-Successors. The Denouement contains elements also found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* ('when he finished ...'; the bed and feet motifs). The death notice is euphemistic, and the meanings of its individual elements (found especially in other death notices in Genesis) cannot be reliably distinguished from one another. The piling up of essentially synonymous terms and phrases is a rhetorical device infusing the moment with narrative solemnity. What follows in Genesis 50 is an extended Denouement that I call an Epilogue, and that is the subject of the next chapter.

# 6 THE EPILOGUE

Genesis 50.1–26

## 6.0 TEXT AND PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1 ויפל יוסף על־פני אביו ויבך עליו וישק־לו: 2 ויצו יוסף את־עבדיו את־הרפאים לחנט את־אביו ויחנטו הרפאים את־ישראל: 3 וימלאו־לו ארבעים יום כי כן ימלאו ימי החנטים ויבכו אתו מצרים שבעים יום: 4 ויעברו ימי בכיתו וידבר יוסף אל־בית פרעה לאמר אִם־נא מצאתי חן בעיניכם דברו־נא באזני פרעה לאמר: 5 אבי השביעני לאמר הנה אנכי מת בקברי אשר כריתי לי בארץ כנען שמה תקברני ועתה אעלה־נא ואקברה את־אבי ואשובה: 6 ויאמר פרעה עלה וקבר את־אביך כאשר השביעך: 7 ויעל יוסף לקבר את־אביו ויעלו אתו כל־עבדי פרעה זקני ביתו וכל זקני ארץ מצרים: 8 וכל בית יוסף ואחיו ובית אביו רק טפה וצאנם ובקדם עזבו בארץ גשן: 9 ויעל עמו גס־רכב גס־פרשים ויהי המחנה כבד מאד: 10 ויבאו עד־גרן האטד אשר בעבר הירדן ויספדו־שם מספד גדול וכבד מאד ויעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים: 11 וירא יושב הארץ הכנעני את־האבל בגרן האטד ויאמרו אבל־כבד זה למצרים על־כן קרא שמה<sup>417</sup> אבל מצרים אשר בעבר הירדן: 12 ויעשו בניו לו כן כאשר צום<sup>418</sup>: 13 וישאו אתו בניו ארצה כנען ויקרבו אתו במערת שדה המכפלה אשר קנה אברהם את־השדה לאחזת־קבר מאת עפרן החתי על־פני ממרא: 14 וישב יוסף מצרימה הוא ו אחיו וכל־העלים אתו לקבר את־אביו אחרי קברו את־אביו<sup>419</sup>: 15 ויראו אחי־יוסף כי־מת אביהם ויאמרו לו ישטמנו יוסף והשב ישיב לנו את כל־הרעה אשר גמלנו אתו: 16 ויצו אל־יוסף לאמר אביך צום לפני מותו לאמר: 17 כה־תאמרו ליוסף אנא שא נא פשע אחיך וחטאתם כי־רעה גמלוך ועתה שא נא לפשע עבדי אלהי אביך ויבך יוסף בדברים אליו: 18 וילכו גס־אחיו ויפלו לפניו ויאמרו הננו לך לעבדים: 19 ויאמר אלהם יוסף אל־תיראו כי התחת אלהים אני: 20 ואתם חשבתם עלי רעה אלהים<sup>420</sup> חשבה לטבה למעם עשה כיום הזה להחית עס־רב: 21 ועתה אל־תיראו אנכי אכלכל אתכם ואת־טפכם וינחם אותם וידבר על־לבם:

<sup>417</sup> Syr. and Sam. have שמו rather than שמה, changing the gender of the pronominal suffix. Which is more correct depends on the referent of the pronoun, which is most likely either ארץ from earlier in the verse or an implied noun like מקום. Both of these are grammatically feminine, meaning the MT reading is more correct, but gender agreement is not absolutely essential.

<sup>418</sup> Gr. adds καὶ ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ = ויקברוהו שם. See note 461 below.

<sup>419</sup> Gr. lacks אחרי קברו את־אביו. The MT reading is superficially redundant, but the immediately preceding לקבר את־אביו is modifying the participle העלים, not the principle verb of the sentence וישב, as the clause does that is missing from the Gr.

<sup>420</sup> Sam. has והאלהים. The meaning is unchanged. The Sam. reading is more typical.

22 וישב יוסף במצרים הוא<sup>421</sup> ובית אביו ויחי יוסף מאה ועשר שנים: 23 וירא יוסף לאפרים בני שלשים גם בני מכיר בן-מנשה ילדו על-ברכי<sup>422</sup> יוסף: 24 ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אנכי מת ואלהים פקד יפקד אתכם והעלה אתכם מן-הארץ הזאת אל-הארץ אשר נשבע לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב: 25 וישבע יוסף את-בני ישראל לאמר פקד יפקד אלהים אתכם והעלתם את-עצמתי מזה<sup>423</sup>: 26 וימת יוסף בן-מאה ועשר שנים ויחנטו אתו ויישם<sup>424</sup> בארון במצרים:

1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 Joseph commanded his physician servants to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 And the forty days of the embalming period were fulfilled, and Egypt mourned him seventy days. 4 The days of Joseph's mourning passed, then he said to the house of Pharaoh, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, speak into the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 "My father put me under an oath saying, 'Look, I and about to die. In my tomb which I cut for myself in the land of Canaan, bury me there.' Now, let me go up and bury my father, and I will return.'" 6 And Pharaoh said, 'Go up and bury your father just as he made you swear.' 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. And there went up with him the servants of Pharaoh, the officials of his house, all the officials of the land of Egypt, 8 all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and the house of his father. Only the little ones and the sheep and cattle they left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him also chariots and horsemen: it was an exceedingly large camp. 10 And they came to Goren Ha'atad which is next to the Jordan, and they performed there an exceedingly great and significant mourning ritual. Joseph mourned his father seven days. 11 The inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in Goren Ha'atad and said, 'This is an important mourning for Egypt.' Therefore the place is called Ebel Mizraim, which is next to the Jordan. 12 So his sons did for him just as he commanded them. 13 His sons took him up to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field which Abraham had purchased as a burial property from Ephron the Hittite, facing Mamre. 14 Then Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all those who had gone up with him to bury his father, after burying his father.

15 The brothers of Joseph saw that their father had died, and they said, 'What if Joseph hates us? He will certainly repay to us all the evil which we dealt out to him.' 16 So they sent word to Joseph saying, 'Your father commanded before his death saying, 17 "Thus shall you say to Joseph: 'I beseech you: forgive the wickedness of your brothers and their sin, for they dealt out to you evil.' So now, forgive, please, the wickedness of the servants of the God of your father.'" Then Joseph wept at these words. 18 Then his brothers also came and fell on their faces before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' 19 Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 Though you intended against me evil, God intended it for good in order to accomplish what has been accomplished this day—the saving of many people. 21 So now, do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones.' And he comforted them and spoke to their hearts.

<sup>421</sup> Gr. adds καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ 'and his brothers.' This could either be original or editorial smoothing.

<sup>422</sup> This idiom is lacking from the Sam., which has בימי יוסף instead of על-ברכי יוסף, transforming this clause into a simple temporal indicator. Other ancient versions agree with MT.

<sup>423</sup> Some manuscripts add אתכם, 'with you.'

<sup>424</sup> MT vocalizes this וַיִּשֶׂם—perhaps the remnants of a Qal passive? (GKC §73 f; see also the K of Gen 24.33). Sam. vocalizes this וַיִּשֶׂם—a Hophal imperfect (so also the Q of Gen 24.33). The meanings of the two forms are essentially the same. The context dictates a passive-like meaning in either case.

**22** Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and the house of his father. And Joseph lived one hundred ten years. **23** Joseph saw his descendants through Ephraim to the third generation, and the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born upon the knees of Joseph. **24** And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am dying, but God will surely visit you and bring you up from this land to the land that he promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' **25** And Joseph bound the sons of Israel by an oath and said, 'When God visits you, take up my bones from here.' **26** Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old. And they embalmed him, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

In the previous chapters we saw how the units Genesis 47.28–31, 48.1–22, 49.1–28, and 49.29–33 formed four chiastically arranged, conventionally-shaped Episodes of Jacob's death-bed story. The stories of Genesis 50 also belong to Jacob's death-bed story complex, but in a different way. Specifically, they are an extended conclusion for the last Episode, a conventional phenomenon I call an Epilogue. This chapter will show how Genesis 50.1–14, 15–21, and 22–26 fit into the standard form of a conventional death-bed story.

## 6.1 DEATH-BED EPILOGUES

The three stories in Genesis 50.1–26 belong organically to Jacob's death-bed story. In other death-bed stories, following one or more of the dying character's Testaments one often finds an Epilogue consisting of a set of notices or stories pertaining to the execution of the character's will, the continuance of that character's legacy, or steps taken by others to insure that the character's death remains a good one. The actual death of the dying character can be viewed either as the conclusion of the last Episode or as the beginning of the following Epilogue.<sup>425</sup> The distinction is based on a subjective reading of the narrative momentum; put another way, the narrated death of a character is the pivot point between the last Episode and the Epilogue material.<sup>426</sup> In this case, Genesis 49.33 is usually kept with the preceding verses because of all the details that identify them together as a P unit, while all these details

---

<sup>425</sup> Isaac's post-Epilogue death is, again, the main exception in the corpus.

<sup>426</sup> See Walsh, pp. 186–189, on 'hinges' and 'double-duty hinges'.

shift to their non-P counterparts starting in 50.1. However, read without verse and chapter divisions, it is clear that, in Genesis' current form, 50.1 is intended to follow onto 49.33 without any kind of scene change.<sup>427</sup> The tempo does not immediately shift from scene to summary, nor is there even any kind of ellipsis. While keeping certain distinctive features of his materials intact, the author combined these texts in such a way as to reduce the appearance of seams, not in the shoddy manner of a haphazard workman.<sup>428</sup>

Epilogues, even when they follow non-final Episodes, tend to shift focus from the Testator to the character carrying out whatever actions are required, so a Worthy Successor or his Agents will become the focalizing character(s).<sup>429</sup> The two parts of Genesis 50.1–21 are a burial narrative (50.1–14)<sup>430</sup> and a story about the

---

<sup>427</sup> Wenham, II, 460; Wilson, p. 203; Arnold, p. 385.

<sup>428</sup> Lunn's analysis of a chiastic structure in Gen 49.29–50.26 is particularly interesting here. His chiasm looks like this: A—Jacob's final words; B—Joseph's appeal to Pharaoh; C—The funeral of Jacob; B'—The brothers' appeal to Joseph; A'—The final words of Joseph. By itself, this chiasm is not convincing, since the details in Joseph's death-bed story parallel a larger part of Jacob's death-bed story than simply 49.29–33. Furthermore, it is difficult to make an argument that 49.29–50.26 is a sufficiently independent textual unit without taking into consideration the larger conventional death-bed schema. However, Lunn's proposal fits in very well with my understanding of 50.1–26 as extended concluding material for the fourth Episode (49.29–33), since we would expect to see unifying features both strictly within the subunit (49.29–50.26) as well as across the larger unit (47.27/28–50.26). Nicholas P. Lunn, 'The Last Words of Jacob and Joseph: A Rhetorico-Structural Analysis of Genesis 49:29–33 and 50:24–26', *TynBul*, 59 (2008), 161–79. Rendsburg (pp. 80–82) also takes 49.29–50.26 as a unit.

<sup>429</sup> For example: Gen 24.10–67 (Abraham's servant); 28.10–35.26 (Jacob); I Kgs 1.38–53 (Zadok, Nathan, Benayahu, Solomon, and others); 2.10–46 (Solomon). In II Kgs 2.1–18, Elisha is the focalizing character both before and after Elijah's assumption, but focalization is stronger when Elijah departs.

<sup>430</sup> A burial notice following the death of the character, if not a full account of the burial as in Jacob's case, is typical (Gen 25.9; 35.29; 50.26; Deut 34.6; Josh 30; I Kgs 2.10; II Kgs 13.20; I Macc 2.70; Tob 14.11–12 is slightly irregular; Jdt 16.23). Elijah's death-bed story in II Kgs 2 is an obvious exception, but the fact that he does not 'die' in the conventional sense and therefore cannot be buried (the disrupting of conventional expectations) is what marks this story as unique. The story makes the most sense in dialogue with the conventions of the typical death-bed story. The same goes for the story of Hezekiah's illness in II Kgs 20, which begins in many ways in a manner similar to a death-bed story. The turning point comes at precisely the point where the story disrupts the expectations of the death-bed story. A specific burial motif is not found in the Chronicler's version of David's final address (I Chr 23.1–29.30), which in many other ways follows the conventions of the typical

survival of Jacob's legacy (50.15–21),<sup>431</sup> both of which are concerns often connected with a death-bed story. In addition, a short conventional death-bed story for Jacob's son Joseph appears in 50.22–26 which functions as a conclusion both to Jacob's death-bed narrative but also to the book of Genesis as a whole. This chapter analyses 50.22–26 first in its role as an Epilogue for Jacob's death-bed story and then as a death-bed story in its own right.

In most instances where a death-bed story is followed by a set of short scenes that are recognizably related, the number of scenes is generally around three. The exact number, depending on how one identifies Epilogue material and the sub-boundaries between the scenes, is anywhere between two and five in the extant examples. The death-bed story of Joshua is concluded by three burial notices: Joshua (24.29–31), Joseph (verse 32), and Eleazar (verse 33). Depending on whether one counts David's death and burial, 1 Kings 2.10–46 has between three and five separate Epilogue scenes. Because of the strongly titular effect of verse 12 in heading the following scenes, the narrative does seem to divide itself here. The following stories, about the establishment of Solomon's reign, concern four characters but really falls into three groups. The section concerning Solomon's dealings with Joab (2.28–35) is bounded by references to Abiathar (2.26–28, 35), so the two actions dealing with Abiathar and Joab are visualized as a single unit. This reading puts the number of Epilogue scenes at three. The 'death' of Elijah in 11 Kings 2 is followed by three passages showing Elisha's assumption of Elijah's authority (four, if one counts the parting of the Jordan in verses 13–14): verses 15–18, 19–22, and 23–25. The death of Elisha is concluded by two stories relating to Elisha's legacy, both in his residual

---

death-bed story. Burial motifs are obviously not exclusive to death-bed stories, but death-bed stories almost always include a burial motif.

<sup>431</sup> For examples of stories or notices concerning the survival of a character's legacy, see Gen 24.10–67; 25.11; 35.22b–27—notice its placement immediately before Isaac's death notice); Deut 34.9–12; Josh 24.31; 1 Kgs 2.12–46; 11 Kgs 2.15–25; 11 Kgs 13.20b–25.

prophetic power (verses 20–21) and in the fate of the Northern Kingdom prophesied in his death-bed story (22–25). Clearly, it is artificial to impose analytical categories on the text too strongly in order to ascertain exact numbers. The point of this observation is that there is a recognizable tendency toward a small number of scenes (approximately three and more than one). This tendency toward revolving around the number three (having an intuitive rhetorical value, as in folklore, rather than a cognitive symbolic one, as in Christian theology) can also be seen in the three segments that make up Jacob's Epilogue.

## 6.2 JACOB'S BURIAL (GENESIS 50.1–14)

The level of detail and grandiosity in Jacob's burial is unmatched in any death-bed story in Hebrew narrative. Most burials are related through a formal notice in one or two sentences, including even the legendary burial of Moses in Deuteronomy 34.6. This fact is partially due to the placement of this story: the death, burial and aftermath of Jacob's death-bed story form not only the conclusion to the life of Jacob but a part of the falling action of the book of Genesis itself.<sup>432</sup> It is also because of the importance of proper burial in Jacob's Testaments.<sup>433</sup> As noted before, while instructions to be executed posthumously are not uncommon, instructions concerning burial are not in themselves typical of death-bed stories. Proper burial is usually assumed by the dying character. The importance of proper burial in Jacob's story is further emphasized by the fact that he gives burial instructions not once, but twice. While there may be diachronic reasons for this, the effect in the final form, as noted

---

<sup>432</sup> Wenham, II, p. 488; Arnold, p. 386. Within Genesis, the grandiosity of Jacob's burial contrasts starkly with the simple burial notices of Abraham and Isaac. Matthews, II, 918.

<sup>433</sup> Berman offers a different motivation for the level of detail, especially for the Egyptian flavour and involvement: Joseph's struggle to reconcile the tension between his birth cultural identity and his adopted cultural identity. Joshua Berman, 'Identity Politics and the Burial of Jacob (Genesis 50:1–14)', *CBQ*, 68 (2006), 11–31.

in earlier chapters, is to put all the sons on relatively equal footing as Worthy co-Successors. It also builds anticipation for the level of detail Jacob's burial will have in the story's Epilogue.

Jacob's and Joseph's death-bed stories are the only two with specific burial requests for themselves, and this is because their dying conditions are unusual in that they die in a foreign land. Proper burial in one's homeland is a *sine qua non* of the ideal death in the ancient Near East.<sup>434</sup> Though burial instructions are uncommon, every example of the conventional death-bed story in the Hebrew Bible includes a burial notice (or its equivalent), as do the stories of Tobit and Mattathias and each of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Furthermore, burial notices, like death notices, tend to be solemnised through idiomatic, repetitive or formal language, and this is accomplished in 50.12–13 with the repetition of the tomb details from 49.29–32 and chapter 23. In the case of Jacob, the burial is further solemnised through a careful attention to detail in the narrative.

Jacob's burial story begins immediately after he has died. Joseph falls upon his deceased father, weeps over him and kisses him. As one might expect, mourning is not an uncommon motif in death-bed stories. When individuals mourn within a

---

<sup>434</sup> I Kgs 13.21–22. See de Vaux, pp. 58–59. The burial instructions in Tob 14.10 are different in three ways. First, Tobit is speaking about the eventual burial of his wife (who is not dying), not himself. Second, the imperative has nothing to do with this burial, which is assumed, but with relocation instructions for Tobias and his family after the burial of Tobit's wife. Third, Tobit and the narrator appear to consider Nineveh sufficiently 'home-territory', because he does not request the removal of his body to Judah. On the other hand, while the death and burial of Moses in Deut 34 is likewise not within the Promised Land (at least not on the west side of the Jordan), it is a tragic and self-consciously not ideal element in an otherwise noble death. The tragedy of it is mitigated by Yahweh's direct involvement in guiding Moses through his death and showing him the Promised Land. The ideal of burial within one's homeland, and the cursedness of death and burial outside the homeland, is also found outside Israelite literature. See n. 117 (section 2.2) for examples from outside Mesopotamia and Egypt. It is important to note that proper burial does not by itself determine the quality of a death. Some men die cursed deaths but are eventually buried. A death cannot be considered good or blessed, however, unless the deceased is buried (or burial is made irrelevant, as in the case of Elijah). Or, syllogistically, all good deaths conclude with burials (or their equivalent), but not all burials conclude good deaths.



conventional death-bed narrative, these individuals are either the Worthy Successor or someone vying for this spot. When performed by the Worthy Successor the mourning shows a special relationship between the mourner and the dying character. In these cases, the mourning motif occurs after the death of the character and in the Epilogue.<sup>435</sup> When the mourning motif is not in close proximity to Epilogue material, i.e. prior to the character's death, it appears to be ironic. For example, Esau cries out and weeps when he discovers that Jacob has stolen his blessing even though Isaac is still alive (Genesis 27.34, 38). However, Esau seems unaffected in his recognition of the imminence of his father's death when he plans his revenge against Jacob (Genesis 27.41).<sup>436</sup> The effect is that Esau seems a great deal more concerned about his inheritance than he is about his father.<sup>437</sup> Similarly, in II Kings 13.14 King Joash goes to see Elisha as he lay dying and immediately begins mourning. He uses the

---

<sup>435</sup> Gen 24.67; 50.1; II Kgs 2.12. In the case of Isaac, the character he mourns is Sarah, not Abraham, but the mourning motif is present at the appropriate moment within a death-bed Episode (after Sarah's death, within the Epilogue).

<sup>436</sup> Driver, p. 261. One could say the same about Jacob, scheming with Rebekah to get the blessing when Isaac, but mourning is not a necessary motif. Esau is specifically open to criticism about that timing of his mourning simply because he is narrated as mourning at all. The narrator's failure to mention mourning by a character is not an implicit criticism of the character.

<sup>437</sup> Esau has been discredited as Isaac's Worthy Successor already in multiple ways before this point: by showing no regard for his birthright (25.34), by marrying women of the forbidden Hittites (26.34–25), and, more subtly, by being sent from and leaving the privileged space of the Worthy Successor (27.3–5). Conversely, Jacob has displayed the conventional features of a Worthy Successor by showing the right sort of regard for the birthright and the blessing, by showing initiative (through his Agent, Rebekah), and by entering into the privileged space of the Worthy Successor. The sort of emotional backwardness displayed by Esau (weeping at the wrong time, not weeping at the appropriate time) is simply what we have come to expect from him. The story subsequently confirms Esau's status as Unworthy Competitor by portraying him taking inappropriate initiative (inappropriate largely because this initiative does not lead him toward Isaac nor does it consult Isaac) and remaining outside of the privileged space. His attempt to please his father in ch. 28 by taking a non-Hittite wife is discrediting not so much because of the ethnicity of the wife (Ishmaelites are not within the Canaanite umbrella category), but because he does so, apparently in an attempt to compete with Jacob, without a direct mandate from Isaac. It also reveals that he does not possess natural perceptiveness into the will of the dying character—an attribute typical of the Worthy Successor. His decision to take a wife and his choice of wife in ch. 28 are, therefore, not problematic except within the context of the conventional plot structure of the Selection of the Worthy Successor. The connection of Esau with Ishmael is a literary strategy for discrediting Esau, not a legal or ethical transgression.

precise phrase Elisha used to express his grief over the departure of Elijah in II Kings 2.12, but this time it is while the dying character is still alive. The different placement in the scene has an impact upon its likely referent, ultimately showing that Joash understands the phrase differently.<sup>438</sup> This detail and a number of others depict Joash as a kind of spiritual buffoon, someone who is not sufficiently perceptive of prophetic realities underlying the physical.<sup>439</sup> Sometimes entire nations mourn, as the Egyptians do in Genesis 50.3 and 50.10–11. When this happens it says less about the status of the mourning party and more about the honour of the deceased one (see also Deuteronomy 34.8; I Samuel 25.1; Judith 16.24; I Maccabees 2.70).<sup>440</sup>

In Genesis 50.1, the depiction of Joseph mourning his father is especially tender (falling on him and kissing him<sup>441</sup>), and this marks him as Worthy Successor.<sup>442</sup> Matthews (II, 916) observes that this is the only time in the Hebrew Bible when the 'falling upon', 'weeping', and 'kissing' motifs are directed toward the

---

<sup>438</sup> Skinner homogenizes the two instances and sees them both as references to the prophet. John Skinner, *I & II Kings*, CeB (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1900), pp. 279–80, 350; so also J. Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 25–26, 124. However, the differences between the two occurrences are important. The phrase אבי אבי והנה רכב־אש וסוסי (אש וירפדו בין שניהם) in II Kgs 2.12 seems to be a literal reference to what Elisha sees (what Elisha sees is a chariot and horses). His perception of the spiritual reality confirms him as Elijah's prophetic heir (Skinner, p. 279; cf. II Kgs 6.17). On the other hand, in II Kgs 13.14, King Joash's identical cry appears to have Elisha himself as the referent: Elisha is figuratively the chariots and horsemen of Israel, that is, he is Israel's national defence strategy (or, less likely, Joash is mourning the sorry state of Israel's military preparedness). Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 88; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 32, 148; see also Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, NIBCOT, 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 228, 232; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WBC, 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), p. 169.

<sup>439</sup> Skinner (*I & II Kings*, p. 350) and Robinson (pp. 124–25) both astutely observe that Elisha's purpose here is to hand over his prophetic authority to Joash, but Joash fails to have the prophetic insight that allowed Elisha to become heir to Elijah.

<sup>440</sup> Von Rad (p. 430) observes, 'Jacob was thus mourned as a king.' See also B. J. van der Merwe, 221–32 (pp. 222–23); Wenham, II, p. 488; Matthews, II, p. 917.

<sup>441</sup> Kissing, specifically, is a recurring motif in death-bed stories (Gen 27.26–27; 48.10; *T. Reu* 1.5; *T. Sim* 1.2; *T. Dan* 7.1; *T. Benj* 1.2). In every case but here in Gen 50.1 the kisser is the dying character, and the recipients are family members, especially the Worthy Successors.

<sup>442</sup> It also fulfils Gen 46.4, 'Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.' Delitzsch, p. 533; Wenham, II, 488.

dead. More typically, in reunion or farewell scenes one finds some selection of the three.<sup>443</sup> While a one-sided farewell is not unprecedented (Genesis 32.1), Joseph's post-mortem actions here may in a sense reciprocate Jacob's kiss and embrace of Manasseh and Ephraim in chapter 48. If so, this is an intra-textual link tying together the final version of Jacob's death-bed story.<sup>444</sup>

The fact that the other brothers do not mourn at this point, however, is not indicative of their emotional callousness or of their status as Unworthy Competitors, since previous passages have already established their status as Successors.<sup>445</sup> Rather, Joseph is the focus here for the same reason he is in 47.29–48.22—he is the first among equals, the chief Worthy Successor and the one primarily responsible for accomplishing the burial request of his father.<sup>446</sup> The brothers are not ignored by the

---

<sup>443</sup> Gen 29.11; 33.4; 45.15; Exod 4.27; 18.7; Ruth 1.9, 14; 1 Sam 20.41; etc.

<sup>444</sup> While Gen 48.1–2, 8–20 and the beginning of Gen 50 have both traditionally been considered a part of the JE redaction, newer critical analyses, especially those that avoid the Documentary Hypothesis sources, are not uniform in their attribution of these sections to a common origin. Donner (*Gestalt*, pp. 32, 34–35) attributes 48.10 to JE, but most of ch. 50 to an original *Josephnovelle*. Redford (pp. 180, 185–86) attributes 50.1–7 to the 'Judah' expansion, but 48.8–20 (wherein the 'kiss' motif occurs) to the Genesis Editor. Longacre (*Joseph*, p. 310) reverses this, attributing ch. 48 to the original Joseph story and chs. 49–50 to *Toledot Jacob* or the merger of the two. In any case, a motivic connection is possible, either as a result of intentional anticipation by the editor, or even by happy accident. The point is that the implied reader plausibly may recognize such a connection.

<sup>445</sup> Their inclusion in the mourning in Gen 50.10 is implied. Though once again Joseph is singled out as the explicit performer the seven-day mourning period, it seems unlikely that the implied reader would envision the brothers not also mourning. Joseph is simply the focalizing character. The seven-day mourning period also occurs in Jdt 16.29, but not otherwise in death-bed stories. It is not uncommon overall, however (1 Sam 31.13/1 Chr 10.12; Job 2.13; Ezek 3.15–16; Sir 22.12). Matthews, II, 919.

<sup>446</sup> Wenham, II, p. 488; Hamilton, II, p. 691. Interpretations like that of Cotter (p. 327) aptly demonstrate the failings of many literary readings that attempt a close reading (especially in interpreting the silences of the narrative) without going to the effort of studying the conventional plot structures that give details their contextual significance. In Cotter's reading, the fact that only Joseph is explicitly said to mourn in v. 1 means that the others are implied not to have mourned, probably because of their disappointment at what Cotter reads as mostly bad or questionably neutral death-bed blessings in Gen 49.1–27. Not only does Cotter miss the special role of Joseph as first among equals, he also misses the point of 49.1–27. We must understand that 49.1–27 is really more important and relevant to the implied reader than to the characters, who do not actually respond to the content of the 'blessing.' In comparison with Cotter's synchronic reading, a simple diachronic explanation of the lack of mourning on the part of the other eleven brothers is actually more compelling, but a more

narrator; they too participate in the burial when and where they can (verses 8, 12–13), but mourning belongs to the one with the special relationship with Jacob, as does the personal responsibility and recognition in the organization of the burial arrangements.<sup>447</sup>

Diachronic analysis has tended to divide this burial story into two competing traditions, one centring around Joseph (50.1–11, 14) and the other around the twelve sons (50.12–13). The points of distinction are features typical of P and non-P texts (verses 12–13 are about 'his sons' and Machpelah, while the portions about Joseph make no mention of Machpelah), the participation of the Egyptians (found only in the 'Joseph' sections), and a geographic conflict (Abel-Mizraim is *בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן*, often taken to mean beyond or east of the Jordan, whereas presumably there would have been a more direct route to Machpelah).

Treating the last point first, geographically, it is possible, though not certain, that there are problems here. Both place names, *גֵּרֶן הָאֵטֵד* and *אֵבֶל מִצְרַיִם* are not known outside of this context. The locating phrase *בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן* is generally taken to mean 'on the other side of the Jordan' with its referent being the east side (speaking from the perspective of one in Canaan).<sup>448</sup> This would imply a circuitous route around the southern tip of the Dead Sea to *גֵּרֶן הָאֵטֵד* where the whole party performed their mourning rituals.<sup>449</sup> The sons of Jacob then would have crossed the Jordan to bury Jacob in the cave of Machpelah. This understanding, however, is

---

careful synchronic reading is better still.

<sup>447</sup> B. J. van der Merwe, 221–32 (p. 227).

<sup>448</sup> Alternatively, some simply suggest that 'the other side' in this context means the west side. Matthews, II, p. 919; Waltke, p. 621. But this view would have the narrator speaking from the perspective of one east of the Jordan in order to refer to the west side, a perspective not otherwise noted in Genesis.

<sup>449</sup> The circuitous route does not necessarily indicate unevenness in the final form. Delitzsch (pp. 534–35) suggests as a rationale for the route a desire to avoid encountering Philistines or Edomites. The route could prefigure the later Israelite entry into Canaan, as suggested by Lowenthal, p. 198; Wenham, II, 492; and Arnold, p. 387. Neither rationalization is particularly compelling.

made problematic by the fact that the inhabitants of the land around גֵּרֵן הַאֲטָד are called הַכְּנַעֲנִי, a designation otherwise only applied to those people groups west of the Jordan.<sup>450</sup> This could lead one to the conclusion that there must have been two traditions about the burial place of Jacob, one east of the Jordan and one west, which have been (not entirely successfully) harmonized in the present text.<sup>451</sup> But all of this depends on understanding בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן to mean ‘the other side of the Jordan.’ Gemser, however, argues compellingly that in many places the phrase simply means ‘in the region/on the side of the Jordan’ and can require further specification to indicate either the east or the west side.<sup>452</sup> Based on the number of instances Gemser points out where this is the case, it would not be a particularly special exception, and it clearly offers the interpretive path of least resistance. The stopping destination of the funeral procession, גֵּרֵן הַאֲטָד, must refer to a region near the west bank of the Jordan (בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן), the inhabitants of which were Canaanites.

With regard to the first point, ‘style’ is an uncertain guide in diachronic analysis, because it never seems clear whether style is a criterion or a result of that analysis. But far more significant than a general distinction of ‘style’ in verses 12–13 is the observation that the suffixes on בָּנִי and לוֹ and the subject of צֹמ lack an immediate antecedent, seeming to point back to Genesis 49.29–33.<sup>453</sup> This is, in my opinion, the only true seam in verses 12–13, but it is potentially an important one. However, the assertion that the suffixes ‘find no suitable antecedents nearer than 49.33’<sup>454</sup> is based on a reading biased against finding antecedents. Jacob is referred to

---

<sup>450</sup> Westermann, III, 227; Hamilton, II, 697.

<sup>451</sup> Schmitt, p. 128; Westermann, III, 227–28. Other evidence for a lost ‘eastern tomb’ tradition, however, is lacking.

<sup>452</sup> B. Gemser, ‘Be’eber Hajjardēn : in Jordan’s borderland’, *VT*, 2 (1952), 349–55; Wenham, II, p. 489; Hamilton, II, p. 697.

<sup>453</sup> Westermann, III, p. 197; Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 539; Carr, p. 95.

<sup>454</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 539.

as Israel in 50.2, and while the absence of a personal name any nearer than that is conspicuous, as recently as 50.10 Jacob is referred to as אביו, 'his [Joseph's] father.' Notice as well that the closest explicit statement of the subject of ויעש in verse 10, whose implied subject is Joseph, is actually verse 7—not so great an interval as that between verses 2 and 12, but still longer than what appears to be the standard interval.

Furthermore, Biblical Hebrew's overall approach to pronouns (or implied subjects) and their antecedents is very different from that of modern English, French, and German. The unnecessary repeated use of the expressed subject 'Joseph' in Genesis 50.22–26 is a good example of the counterpart phenomenon.<sup>455</sup> Elsewhere, pronouns are sometimes present in Hebrew where they would be awkward in English, and they are sometimes absent where English would require them (see Joüon §137 *f2*; §146 *g*, *h*, and *i*). The antecedent of a pronominal suffix is, at times, ambiguous, as in Genesis 15.6. In good English style, whenever the antecedent of a pronoun changes this must be clarified, but this is not the case in Hebrew, where the referent of a pronominal suffix attached to a preposition or the subject of a verb is sometimes left to the reader to figure out from the context.<sup>456</sup> The subject of repeated instances of ויאמר (and other verbs) often must be inferred from the context or the content of the speech.<sup>457</sup> Johnson suggests that, in a few places, a noun implied by a verb but not actually present in the text is the proper antecedent for the pronominal suffix.<sup>458</sup> In light of this, the final form may not be as uneven as is commonly

---

<sup>455</sup> Unnecessary but intentional. See Lunn, 161–79 (pp. 178–79). Lowenthal's explanation (pp. 159–60) for this is interesting.

<sup>456</sup> From earlier in the death-bed story, for example, see 48.1–2: 'he said' ויאמר, 'he took' ויקח, 'his sons' בניו, 'with him' עמו, 'he told' ויגד, and again ויאמר are six concentrated examples of verbs or pronominal suffixes without explicit referents.

<sup>457</sup> Again an example from Jacob's death-bed story is 47.29–31: ויאמר three times in a row and then וישבע with unexpressed alternating subjects.

<sup>458</sup> Timothy Johnson, 'Implied Antecedents in Job xl 2b and Proverbs iii 6a', *VT*, 52 (2002), 278–84.

asserted, and it is not at all certain that Genesis 50.12–13 is an unaltered remnant of an original P narrative wherein they immediately followed what is now 49.33.<sup>459</sup> One could even, potentially, hold that 49.29–33 are an older tradition while at the same time maintaining that 50.1–14 is a whole composition if one supposes that the author of 50.1–14 intentionally emulated aspects of 49.29–33 in verses 12–13 in order to integrate the two burial request traditions after the fact.<sup>460</sup> In summary, the lack of nearby antecedents for the pronominal suffixes in 50.12–13 is not automatically grounds for dividing up the text into pre-Genesis units or presuming a mechanical cut-and-paste editorial method.

On the contrary, in almost every other way, the presumed two variants are integrated very well. The ‘Joseph’ sections enhance the scene’s drama and show the Egyptians, the future villains of the Exodus, paying princely honour to Jacob. Genesis 50.12–13, however, complement and complete this dramatic framework. First, the Joseph section does not actually narrate the burial itself, just all the events around the burial. This would indicate either that the JE redaction (or whatever 50.1–12, 14 are) did not originally have a burial account (which seems unlikely) or that it was omitted in favour of the P burial account rather than being integrated (which would be special pleading, since elsewhere the editor is accused of mindlessly keeping all variants of a story). In either case, 50.1–11, 14 would be

---

<sup>459</sup> Rendtorff (*Problem*, p. 162) rejects the idea of a running P document, but still assigns 49.29–33 and 50.12–14 to the same layer of reworking. I find it easier to understand how a previously coherent narrative could be spliced into another with minimal invasive editing than to understand how an editor or redactor would actually craft a later version of the Machpelah tradition (49.22–33, as opposed to 23 and 25.7) and then splice it into a previously existing document without syntactic adjustment. A previously existing P document is a better explanation than what Rendtorff presents. Redford also rejects the existence of P as a document: ‘There is no literary work of his which had prior existence, no self-contained “P-code”’ (p. 26). For Redford, P is the ‘Genesis Editor’, to whom he assigns all of ch. 49 as well as 50.7–14, both of which he appears to take as previously existing units (pp. 180, 186). This hardly solves the syntactical problem in vv. 12–13, but assuming the pronoun-antecedent problem is not, in fact, problematic (as I am suggesting), Redford’s view parallels my own in many ways.

<sup>460</sup> Matthews, II, 920.

incomplete without 50.12–13. Second (and related to the first point), Joseph's speech in 50.5 lays out the programme for the following verses, including verses 12–13: 'Let me go up' [50.7–11], and bury my father [12–13], and I will return [14].<sup>461</sup> Virtually all diachronic analyses attribute verse 5 to the oldest layer of chapter 50<sup>462</sup> and verses 12–13 to the latest.<sup>463</sup> So, unless 50.1–14 are an original unit, either the correlation is a coincidence, or a larger chunk of text was constructed according to an outline found in a verse that, in its original context, was not an outline.

Third, Hebrew narrative convention accounts for some of the perceived unevenness. Wenham observes that, according to his reading of Genesis 50.12–13, only the sons of Jacob enter Canaan, and this points to an eastern location for גרן האטד.<sup>464</sup> However, if verses 12–13 are understood as a resumptive summary rather than a sequential scene, Wenham's perceived problem disappears. Verses 12–13 are not narrating something that happens subsequent to their arrival in גרן האטד, but rather they restate in summary form the whole trip, including the previously unnarrated burial.<sup>465</sup> In Hebrew narrative the actual accomplishment or conclusion of a deed toward which a narrative has been moving is often summarised or recapitulated in concluding narration.<sup>466</sup> Therefore, neither the shift in tempo nor the apparent retelling of their travels from Egypt are stylistically aberrant so as to warrant diachronic explanation or an eastern location for גרן האטד.

---

<sup>461</sup> Westermann, III, 226; Matthews, II, 916.

<sup>462</sup> JE (Procksch; Gunkel; Driver; Skinner); the Judah version or expansion of the Joseph story (Redford; Schmitt); the original Joseph narrative (Westermann).

<sup>463</sup> Usually P. Other: the Genesis Editor (Redford) or a later reworking (Rendtorff).

<sup>464</sup> Wenham, II, 489; see also Lowenthal, pp. 149–150.

<sup>465</sup> The Gr. reading, which adds 'and they buried him there' to the end of v. 12, makes the resumptive or summarizing nature of the verse even clearer.

<sup>466</sup> Just a very few examples of this in Genesis are 17.23–27; 19.29; 19.36; 21.20–21; 21.32; 23.20; 47.26. Humphreys, p. 207, reads vv. 12–13 in this way.



Fourth, Genesis 50.12–13 narrow the focus to the Israelites only. While the Egyptians play a significant role in the body preparation, funeral procession and ritual mourning, the Egyptians disappear from the scene specifically for the burial. The burials of Abraham and Isaac are intimate events, being carried out not by all their servants but simply by two sons in both cases (Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob). Perhaps the event of the burial itself is felt to be too solemn or too intimate to admit foreigners to the scene.<sup>467</sup> If so, 50.12–13 accomplish something vital that the ‘Joseph’ story does not by narrowing the perspective.

Fifth, Genesis 50.12–13 confirm the legality and proper procedure of the burial in accordance with Genesis 23 and 49.29–32, finally resolving this theme. The ‘Joseph’ sections pay no attention to this theme. These latter two distinctives could be used to argue for diachronic development in the text, but they also show that 50.12–13 fit so well into their current context that, if they were originally separate, they have been integrated nearly seamlessly through an effort on the part of the final hand which can only be described as compositional.

### 6.3 THE SURVIVAL OF JACOB’S LEGACY (GENESIS 50.15–21)

Following the burial of Jacob, the brief story addressing the fear of the eleven brothers that Joseph will now have them killed fits within the range of typical motifs and concerns of a death-bed type-scene as the stereotypical good death. It is essentially a story dealing with the survival of Jacob’s legacy. If, as the eleven brothers feared, Joseph was simply waiting until Jacob passed away to have them killed (like Esau in Genesis 27.41), much of the blessedness of Jacob’s death would be nullified, based as it was on reconciliation among his sons and the survival of all

---

<sup>467</sup> Vawter (p. 472) attributes this motivation toward intimacy to the Priestly writer. This may be accurate, but the point here is that through the preservation of this detail, the intimacy and the final exclusion of the Egyptians has become a notable feature of the final form. Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 539.

twelve of them (not just Joseph, and not just the sons of Rachel—see Genesis 42.36).<sup>468</sup> Fraternal strife/peace is a recurring theme in Genesis (beginning in chapter 4), and reconciliation plays a role in the resolutions to the Abraham and Isaac death-bed stories, as well (Ishmael and Isaac bury Abraham, Esau and Jacob bury

---

<sup>468</sup> The report of Jacob's wishes in Gen 50.17 from the mouths of the brothers need not be held in suspicion. Commentators focused on diachronic investigation are here and elsewhere a little over-eager when it comes to identifying unevenness in the text. For example, see Redford, p. 163. Literary-critical commentators, for their part, have a tendency to interpret any silence in the most sinister way possible (often justified via appeal to the vague and abused category of 'gapping'), including situations like this: reported speech whose original utterance was not narrated. Other examples include the changes in Jacob's wages in Gen 31.7 (and possibly, in the following verses, the reason for the plan of ch. 30), and the prior selection of Solomon to be king after David in 1 Kgs 1.13, 17, 29–30 (see also Lowenthal's exposition of 37.27; 42.12, 16, 34b; 43.3, and 7 for passages where this *ex post facto* narrative strategy is possibly used more subtly). In both of these cases, commentators routinely assume that the content of the reported speech is false (that Laban did not change Jacob's wages ten times, that David had not actually selected Solomon to be king, at least not officially), and some suspect Joseph's brothers of the same dishonesty in Gen 50.16–17. See Robert Davidson, p. 314; Coats, *Genesis*, p. 312; Sternberg, p. 379; W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, Studies on Personalities in the Old Testament (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 85; Hamilton, II, 703; Waltke, p. 622; Arnold, p. 387. But these assumptions are unfounded. In all three cases, the other characters act as if the reported speech is true. Neither the narrator nor any characters ever contest these reported speeches. The outworking of events also favours the veracity of the reported speech (Jacob is justified in leaving Laban; Joseph does not hold a grudge against his brothers; Solomon is confirmed as king), with success in those events sometimes implying God's approval and behind-the-scenes activity (as in Gen 24). The reporting of events in dialogue after the fact seems to be a feature of Hebrew poetics, so readers cannot assume the falseness of such dialogue. Von Rad (p. 432), Westermann (III, 231), and Lowenthal (pp. 151–53) specifically reject the presumption of falseness, while Matthews (II, 925–26) and Janzen (pp. 201–2) assume the trustworthiness of the report. Wenham (II, 490) notes, 'In mitigation, it may be said that if Jacob had known, he might have said something like this.' Wilson, p. 206, is only partially correct that it is a moot point whether or not we are to understand the request to have originated with Jacob. While little changes in the present text other than the reader's lasting impression of the brothers, whether gaps are to be approached with suspicion by the reader or given the benefit of the doubt is an important hermeneutical question.

Isaac).<sup>469</sup> Their cooperation in Jacob's burial implies this reconciliation,<sup>470</sup> but the narrator chooses to verify it with one more story.<sup>471</sup>

The survival of a dying character's legacy is a very common element of death-bed stories and especially their Epilogues. But it is also extremely varied and customised to the given character's situation. For Abraham, the concern for the survival of his legacy is the motivation for the story of Genesis 24.1–67, but it is also the reason for the brief notice in 25.11 that God blessed Isaac and that Isaac dwelt in Beer-lahai-roi.<sup>472</sup> Isaac's death and burial in 35.22b–29 is immediately preceded by a summary of Jacob's sons, not for Jacob's sake but for Isaac's. The note in Genesis 37.1 parallels Genesis 25.11b and has the same purpose: the continuance of the legacy. Moses' and Joshua's legacies are tied to the continuing obedience of the Israelites after their deaths (Deuteronomy 31.24–32.47; Joshua 24, especially verses 14–27 and 31). The security of Solomon on the throne of Israel is David's legacy concern, and his death and burial are immediately followed by a series of actions

---

<sup>469</sup> An interesting contrast is found in 1 Kgs 2, where fraternal violence follows David's death rather than reconciliation, even though Solomon and Adonijah appear to be reconciled by the end of ch. 1. It is possible and even likely that the implied reader's response to Solomon's execution of Adonijah is informed by a conventional expectation of reconciliation. On the other hand, perhaps violence is the norm, while Joseph's behaviour is highly exceptional.

<sup>470</sup> Wenham, II, 488.

<sup>471</sup> Matthews, II, 923. Westermann (III, 23) views this story as a kind of recapitulation of ch. 45 and notes that forgiveness of sin is mentioned twice in ch. 50, whereas in ch. 45 it is not to be found. This creates in the story in ch. 50 a degree of resolution and fraternal reconciliation not before achieved. Furthermore, in the earlier reconciliation Joseph was emphatically concerned with his father (45.3, 9, 13). The story in 50.15–21 verifies that Joseph had not been exclusively concerned with his father. See also, Arnold, p. 388. It is significant to note that since fraternal reconciliation is not simply a theme within the Joseph story but throughout Genesis, it works against diachronic arguments for an originally independent Joseph story (at least one that is sufficiently whole in the present text that it can be clearly distinguished from the rest of Genesis). Any previously existing Joseph story has been thoroughly worked into the present form of Genesis.

<sup>472</sup> A notice, incidentally, that forms an *inclusio* with the mention of blessing in 24.1, supposedly a different diachronic layer—yet more evidence that, regardless of their origin, these stories were reworked and integrated into a conventionally coherent whole.

taken by Solomon towards just that end (1 Kings 2.13–46).<sup>473</sup> The stories in 11 Kings 2.19–25 and 13.22–25 are attached to the end of their death-bed stories specifically to affirm the endurance of the legacies of their respective Testators. Therefore, the inclusion of this story at this very point in Genesis is no mystery or appendage.<sup>474</sup> Rather, it is a perfectly typical realisation of one of the concerns of the death-bed story as the ideal good death: the continuance of the dying character's legacy.

## 6.4 JOSEPH'S DEATH AS EPILOGUE (GENESIS 50.22–26)

The death of Joseph in Genesis 50.22–26<sup>475</sup> is both a part of the Epilogue of Jacob's death as well as an example of the conventional death-bed story itself. Epilogue material is often made up of narratives sophisticated and independent enough to be ordered by other conventional plot structures.<sup>476</sup> I have found no other example where a death-bed story functions as part of an Epilogue for another death-bed story (at least as immediately as Joseph's death-bed story would for Jacob's), but there is no reason *a priori* that such a thing could not occur.

---

<sup>473</sup> Even if they are Macchiavellian, David feels them to be necessary and justified (1 Kgs 2.5–9). Furthermore, there may be a contrast intended between David's final wishes and Solomon's execution of his wishes. B. J. van der Merwe (221–32 (p. 228)) also identifies a commonality in this regard between these two death-bed stories to bolster his reading of Joseph as successor to Jacob.

<sup>474</sup> As opposed to, for example, the view of Coats (*Genesis*, pp. 33, 301) who considers Gen 50.15–21 to be a recapitulation of the Joseph story's Denouement and not inherently related to the Jacob death report.

<sup>475</sup> It is worth noting that older source critics did not always group Gen 50.22–26 as a unit, in which has often been identified a combination of J and E material. See esp. Procksch, pp. 286, 426; Gunkel, p. 440. More recently, Schmidt attributes v. 22 to the part of ch. 50 that stems from J with bits of E (vv. 1–11, 14, 22), while vv. 23–26 he regards as prohibitively difficult to pinpoint. More commonly, vv. 15–26 are all attributed to the Elohist's conclusion to the Joseph story, with vv. 22–26 forming a distinct narrational subunit. Ludwig Schmidt, *Literarische Studien zur Josephsgeschichte*, BZAW, 167 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), p. 212. See also Driver, p. 397; Speiser, p. 378. Westermann (III, 235), reading 50.22–26 as a unit, nevertheless sees vv. 22–23 and 24–26 as two originally distinct concluding notices but holds that no author can be attributed.

<sup>476</sup> Especially Gen 24.10–67; 28.10–35.26; Josh 13–22. The death-bed story acts in these cases as an interpretive framework that infuses meaning into stories it frames.

Joseph's death-bed story is far more summarized than any other death-bed story in the corpus, especially in Genesis. It hardly enters into scenic tempo at all, and it is far shorter than even the next shortest specimen. Thus it packs numerous conventional elements into a very dense package. What can this signify? Joseph's death stands in some ways outside of the standard structure of Genesis in that his death is narrated but he has no *toledot* section named after him which his death may conclude.<sup>477</sup> Perhaps it is summarized precisely because it is functioning as part of the Epilogue to Jacob's story.

Diachronically, while it might initially seem plausible for Joseph's death-bed story to be the natural conclusion of the pre-Genesis Joseph story, there is some agreement that 50.22–26 did not originally belong with the Joseph story at all.<sup>478</sup> The strongest argument that its connection with Jacob's final-form death-bed complex is closer than its relationship with any pre-Genesis Joseph story is the density of its parallels with Genesis 47.27–50.14 without any marked recapitulation of themes distinctly connected with the Joseph narrative.<sup>479</sup> Joseph's death-bed story, like Jacob's, belongs to the final-form.

The opening phrase *וישב יוסף במצרים* recalls Genesis 25.11 and 37.1, the former of which especially is part of the conclusion to Abraham's death-bed story. Genesis 37.1 should also probably be considered more a concluding motif than an introductory motif, given that the *toledot* formula, the primary macro-structural

---

<sup>477</sup> Among important male characters in the Patriarchal History portion of Genesis, all those whose deaths are narrated are, in fact, the title characters of that section's *toledot*.

<sup>478</sup> Westermann, III, 234–35; Longacre, p. 310; Redford, pp. 180, 186. However, see Donner (*Gestalt*, p. 35), who attributes vv. 22 and 26 to the Joseph story. Similarly, Schmitt (pp. 78–79) assigns vv. 22, 23, 26a and b to the Judah story, vv. 24–25 to the Reuben story (except for the mention of 'the land which God swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob').

<sup>479</sup> Westermann's list of parallels with the preceding narratives (III, 237) is not exhaustive: Joseph remains in Egypt // 47.27; his age // 47.9 (a better parallel is 47.28); 50.23a // 48.11; v. 23b // 48.3–6; v. 24 // 48.21; v. 25 // 47.29–31 and 49.29–32; v. 26a // 49.33; v. 26b // 50.2. See also Coats, *Genesis*, p. 314.

heading in Genesis, follows it. This phrase, then, connects 50.22–26 to Jacob's death-bed story by following a previously established pattern.<sup>480</sup>

If Joseph's death is viewed as a part of the Epilogue of Jacob's death-bed story, what is it accomplishing? How is it dealing with the concerns of Jacob's death specifically? First of all, it traces the descendants of Jacob another several generations and shows the flourishing of his progeny. Second, it reaffirms the Patriarchal Promise of land and Jacob's prophecy of a future divine visitation (48.21) through Joseph's prophecy of the same sort. Especially noteworthy is the appearance in Genesis 50.24 of the patriarchal formula 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' in its fully realized form for the first time in Genesis.<sup>481</sup> This threefold formula, which is so important in the following narratives, was predicted but not quite realized in 48.15–16 and 49.31. Jacob's entry into the Patriarchal 'pantheon', so to speak, shows his spiritual legacy preserved and coming to fruition. Joseph's death-bed story also lays a charge upon the Israelites that cannot be fulfilled until the divine visitation, creating an unresolved plot line that will not allow the future visitation to be seen as irrelevant.<sup>482</sup> The blessedness of Jacob's death, like those of Abraham and Isaac, is at least partially contingent on the vindication of Jacob's faith in God through the total fulfilment of the Patriarchal Promise. By creating this unresolved plot line and repeating Jacob's prophecy of a future visitation, Joseph/the narrator (the two are indistinguishable at this point) ties the blessedness of not only Joseph's death but also Jacob's to the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan more consciously. It does not so much assure the full blessedness of Jacob's or Joseph's deaths as it points forward to the events that will assure it.

---

<sup>480</sup> Wenham, II, 490.

<sup>481</sup> Waltke, p. 627; Arnold, p. 388.

<sup>482</sup> Wenham, II, 491.

## 6.5 JOSEPH'S DEATH AS CONVENTIONAL DEATH-BED STORY

Joseph's death-bed story provides an excellent example of the death-bed type-scene structure at its simplest, where its three-part structure is easily discernible.<sup>483</sup>

### 6.5.1 THE PREPARATION (GENESIS 50.22–23)

22 וישב יוסף במצרים הוא ובית אביו ויחי יוסף מאה ועשר שנים: 23 וירא יוסף לאפרים בני שלשים גם בני מכיר בן-מנשה ילדו על-ברכי יוסף:

22 Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and the house of his father. And Joseph lived one hundred ten years. 23 Joseph saw his descendants through Ephraim to the third generation, and the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born upon the knees of Joseph.

The Preparation in 50.22–23<sup>484</sup> consists of four distinct kinds of motifs found in other death-bed stories, especially, but not exclusively, Jacob's. First, the narrator summarizes Joseph's remaining life. This motif, using the verb **וישב**, recalls 47.27, a verse which I have left outside of the main death-bed complex in my consideration, since it seems more closely related to the passage that comes before it. But here in 50.22 not only do we have **וישב**, as in 47.27, but also **ויחי** and an age notice, which appear in 47.28. As noted before, though the evidence is slightly in favour of connecting verse 27 with what precedes it, the role of the verse in the narrative is best understood not too rigidly. It is a transition, and the division of Hebrew narrative (like much other narrative) into discrete chunks is often artificial. So while **וישב** is a relatively common verb, and its usefulness in making linguistic connections is therefore somewhat mitigated, it is still conspicuous as being in the immediate

<sup>483</sup> For this reason, Gen 50.22–26 functioned as a partial template for the early stages of my research. I have, however, tried (probably with only moderate success) to be careful not to impose order perceived in Joseph's death on other death-bed stories in a drastically foreign way.

<sup>484</sup> I am treating vv. 22–23 as a subsection of the conventional death-bed story. Westermann (III, 235) also distinguishes vv. 22–23 for individual treatment, but his reasons are diachronic. He sees vv. 22–23 and vv. 24–26 as two originally independent units which have been combined at a late stage in the composition of the book. This idea is specifically rejected by Coats (*Genesis*, p. 314), who treats vv. 22–26 as a single unit, noting many of the same conventional features noted here.

context of Jacob's death. It is very possible, perhaps even probable, that it is intended to recapitulate 47.27, as ויחי recapitulates 47.28, particularly if 50.22–26 is from a very late stage in the composition of Genesis and presupposes a more or less finalized version of what precedes it.<sup>485</sup>

As in 47.27, the significance of this summary is not merely that it communicates the location of the residence of Joseph and his father's clan, but rather that it implies a stable situation of peace and prosperity in the intervening time after the conclusion of the last narrative unit.<sup>486</sup> Secondly, the narrator gives Joseph's total life span. As in 47.28, the narrative function of the motif is more than simply the surface level information. It moves present story time forward to a specific point in time, pinpointing the reach of the previous summary to the end of Joseph's life. In this way, it brings to the reader's awareness the imminence of Joseph's death. Any information after this but before the death notice pertains to the events and situation of the end of Joseph's life.

As noted in chapter 2, the chosen line genealogy formula consists of four parts, the second of which is the amount of time lived after a significant event (usually the birth of the next generation). The third element is the total number of years lived followed by a death notice. In 50.22, the total time lived by Joseph follows the phrasing of the second element, which is also present in Genesis 47.28

---

<sup>485</sup> Despite certain P-like features, especially in vv. 22–23 and 26, almost no one attributes any part of 50.22–26 to P. Rendtorff, *Problem*, p. 158; Westermann, III, 235. However, Redford (pp. 25–26) seems to treat the Priestly layer and the Genesis Editor as identical and as the final redactor. This editor added 50.22–26. Whether 50.22–26 is priestly or is consciously imitative of priestly texts, the fact that it parallels two verses typically attributed to P (or one to P and one to something else) points very strongly to its lateness, presupposing something like a nearly finalized Jacob-Joseph complex. My position is very similar to that of Coats (*Genesis*, p. 314), who does not, like Westermann, consider vv. 22–23 originally independent of vv. 24–26, and who takes 47.28 as the beginning of Jacob death and 47.27 as a natural ending for what precedes. He writes, 'This unit may thus reflect a stage in the redaction when the Joseph novella and the Jacob death report had already been combined.' Coats also identifies a presupposition of the adoption of ch. 48 in 50.24. See also de Hoop, p. 326; Arnold, p. 385.

<sup>486</sup> Matthews, II, 928.



(the ‘seventeen years’ detail), but instead of giving how long Joseph lived after the death of his father (or any significant event—it lacks this specification), it gives his total lifespan.<sup>487</sup> This combines mathematically the first and second parts of the chosen line genealogical formula. The third and fourth parts are found in verse 26. Genesis 50.22b, then, is a variation on the chosen-line formula and an element tying this section in with the final form of Genesis.

Third, the narrator reveals that Joseph saw the sons and grandsons of his own sons Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>488</sup> In all cultures, and in Hebrew literature specifically, to have many descendants, and especially male progeny to carry on the family line, is commonly known to be a sign of a good life,<sup>489</sup> but even better than merely having

---

<sup>487</sup> Despite the presence of standard chosen-line formulae, Gen 50.22–26 cannot be considered *Toledot Joseph*, and no one to my knowledge argues so. The lack of a *toledot* phrase is no certain indication that 50.22–26 is not a narrative unit of equal importance with, say, 25.19–35.29, for example. The section about Abraham—Genesis 12.1–25.11—is not *Toledot Terah*. It is to be considered an unnamed *Toledot Abraham* (though I have found no one, so far, who views the text in this way). However, as the chosen-line genealogies of chs. 5 and 11 contain multiple generations within a single *toledot* unit, here too it seems that Joseph’s death is included within the *Toledot Jacob* section.

<sup>488</sup> Following Dillmann, Delitzsch, Gunkel, Westermann, Wenham, and others. The requires reading construct בני as members of the group (GKC §128 v). Otherwise, בני שלשים refers to Joseph’s great-great-grandchildren, at least through Ephraim, functionally the fourth generation (so, for example, Driver, p. 399; Moshe Weinfeld, *Sēfer Bērē’šit*, Hamishah Hummeshei Torah Im Perush Hadash, 1, rev. and corr. edn (Tel Aviv: Gordon, 1975), p. 319; Matthews, II, 929). Compare Exod 20.5; 34.7; Num 14.18; Deut 5.9. The fourth generation is elsewhere rhetorically significant (Job 42.16; see also ‘The Mother of Nabonidus’ (*ANET*, p. 561): ‘I saw my great-great-grandchildren, up to the fourth generation, in good health and (thus) had my fill of old age.’; Franz Rosenthal, ‘The Sepulchral Inscription of Agbar, Priest of the Moon-God in Nerab’, in *ANET*, p. 661: ‘... and with my eyes, what do I see? Children of the fourth generation, who wept for me, being distraught.’). However, the parallel phrase in the second half of the verse can only refer to great-grandchildren, so the parallelism would move from a larger number to a smaller number—not a feature of either Hebrew or Ugaritic parallelism. See Adele Berlin, ‘Parallelism’, *ABD*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 155–62 (p. 157); Stanislav Segert, ‘Parallelism in Ugaritic Poetry’, *JAOS*, 103 (1983), 295–306 (p. 304). Sam. has absolute בנים rather than construct, which would designate Joseph’s great-grandchildren. Syr., Gr., and the *T. Ps-J* also understand Joseph’s great-grandchildren.

<sup>489</sup> Bailey, pp. 48–52; Whybray, *The Good Life*, pp. 5–6, 15–18, 289–90. Whybray rightly notes that descendants are closely connected conceptually to material wealth. Remarkably, after this assertion in the introduction Whybray makes no mention of descendants *per se* in his concluding chapter. Either he implies descendants in his paragraph on wealth, or else he includes the discussion of descendants with that of family relationships and ancestry and so assigns the importance of descendants only a secondary status, conflicting with his introduction. This may be a result of his synchronic and

descendants is the chance to actually see them with one's own eyes.<sup>490</sup> Not just the posthumous fact but the assurance of the continuation of one's line/legacy is extremely important feature of a blessed death and a recurring theme in connection with conventional death-bed scenes. On the contrary, ignoble deaths are sometimes preceded by the dying character's awareness of the death of his descendants (1 Samuel 4.17; 31.2).

#### 6.5.1.1 The Meaning of ילדו על-ברכי

The meaning of the idiomatic expression גם בני מכיר בן-מנשה ילדו על-ברכי יוסף in v. 23b is a source of confusion. As to the phrase's etymology (and, therefore, its literal meaning), Stade may be correct that it comes from ancient Israelite birthing procedure, specifically in describing the lap of the one receiving the child as a place of honour.<sup>491</sup> Richter ('Auf den Knien', 436–37), however, is right to caution that this interpretation is exceedingly hypothetical, especially when his understanding of על as 'on one's behalf' (as in Judges 9.17; Job 42.8) and of ברכים as a euphemism fits the contexts so well and renders the etymological interpretation unnecessary.

By far the most common non-literal reading of this phrase is as an idiom for adoption.<sup>492</sup> But this interpretation is prohibitively problematic. It lacks a genuine

---

canonical methodology. The concluding chapter is an attempt to harmonize the book-by-book results that make up the bulk of *The Good Life*, and this may be an unnecessary or even impossible endeavour to begin with. On the other hand, his chapter on Genesis emphasizes the importance of family relationships and not just descendants.

<sup>490</sup> Gen 48.11; Job 42.16. See Wenham, II, p. 491. This appears to be the rationale behind the enumeration of Jacob's sons (note the absence of Dinah, contrasted with her listing in 46.15) in ch. 35 just before the death notice of Isaac—it is implied thereby that Isaac gets to see his grandsons. In the death of David, the concern is not so much with descendants generally as with seeing Solomon secure on the throne: 'Blessed be Yahweh, God of Israel, who has granted today that one sit on my throne, and my eyes have seen it' (1 Kgs 1.48). Note also that the Epilogue (1 Kgs 2.12–46) is not concerned with the survival of all his children (Adonijah is killed) but with the security of Solomon on the throne (vv. 12 and 46).

<sup>491</sup> B. Stade, 'Miscellen. 15 "Auf Jemandes Knieen Gebären"', *ZAW*, 6 (1886), 143–56. BDB also lists occurrences of ברכים in Gen 30.3 and 50.23 as literal rather than euphemistic knees.

<sup>492</sup> The vast majority of commentators default to this reading.

foundation, since, on one hand, scholars have based this understanding of Genesis 30.3 and 50.23 on 48.12, but on the other, they have also based their understanding of 48.12 on 30.3 and 50.23. None of these texts, however independently associates adoption specifically with the knee imagery or the ‘born on the knee’ idiom. As mentioned in chapter 3, the absence of prescriptive laws relating to adoption in OT lawcodes is not a sufficient argument against the likely existence of adoption in ancient Israel. Therefore adoption is an option in Genesis 50.23, but evidence for it must be sought independent of the idiom.

Sufficient evidence, however, is lacking. There has yet to be a strong answer to the articles by Stade<sup>493</sup> and Donner<sup>494</sup> calling the ‘adoption’ understanding of the idiom into question. Earlier it was asserted that ‘adoption’ is best understood as the establishment of legal fictive relationships with inheritance ramifications, and this would seem to describe the events of Genesis 30. However, as Donner has rightly pointed out, the relationship between Rachel and the sons of Bilhah (and between Leah and sons of Zilpah) is not a fully adoptive one.<sup>495</sup> First of all, the context of ancient Near Eastern legal practice shows that, because Bilhah was already the maidservant of Rachel, Rachel had a legal connection to the sons of Bilhah by Jacob without needing to adopt them.<sup>496</sup> The relationship is an odd one for modern readers,

---

<sup>493</sup> Richter (‘Auf den Knien’, 436–37) simply points out that we cannot be certain that the phrase goes back to a literal birthing procedure, as Stade asserts. He jumps too quickly, however, back to the conclusion that it must, therefore, be an idiom for adoption.

<sup>494</sup> Donner, ‘Adoption’, 87–119. See section 3.2.4.3.

<sup>495</sup> Westermann correctly refrains from describing the events of ch. 30 as an adoption, but concerning 50.23 he says that the idiomatic expression ‘kann entsprechend Gen 30.3 nur bedeuten, daß sie von Joseph adoptiert wurden.’ On the contrary, in relation to 30.3, one must conclude the sons of Machir are in fact not being adopted by Joseph, since adoption is not what is happening in ch. 30. Westermann, II, 578; III, 235.

<sup>496</sup> Donner, ‘Adoption’, 87–119 (pp. 106–7). Furthermore, in ancient Near Eastern adoption contracts, when a female adopts there is no mention of a husband (as in *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur: Dated in the Reigns of the Cassite Rulers*, ed. by Albert T. Clay, The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts (Philadelphia: Department of Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania, 1906), XIV, no. 40). It would seem, in fact, that adoption by

but Bilhah's sons were seen to be building up Rachel without either (1) ceasing to be considered Bilhah's sons or (2) occupying the place of a possible future natural son by Rachel (see Genesis 30.23), and this sort of dynamic is borne witness to in numerous marriage contracts from the ancient Near East. Selman's statement that the use of the idiom יֶאֱבְנָה 'suggests that Sarah and Rachel considered that the children born in this way would be reckoned to them rather than to their real mothers' is a common overstatement.<sup>497</sup> It is not that they considered that the children would be theirs rather than the birth mothers', but that they would be considered theirs in addition to and in a different way from the way they would be attributed to their birth mothers. This is most clearly seen in the fact that Leah speaks of having given birth to six sons rather than eight (i.e. excluding the sons of Zilpah), and it is not until Rachel bears Joseph that her disgrace is removed in 30.23.<sup>498</sup>

In light of this, Donner rightly dismisses the notion that the phrase 'born on the knee of someone' indicates adoption. However, as noted in ch. 3, knee imagery may be connected with adoption, as in Genesis 48. Confusion is the only result of any attempt to harmonize the three 'knee' passages in Genesis at the level of specificity generally sought. It connotes identification, but the extent and nature of that identification is not specified. Elsewhere the thematized space of the knee, the bosom, and the lap connote maternal care without necessarily implying legitimation or adoption. A very similar relationship between (great-)grandparent and (great-)grandchild is seen in Ruth 4.16–17 without the term בֶּרֶךְ coming into play. So what we have is a family of related anatomical images, roughly encompassing the chest and lap, where a parental relationship is implied. The phrase 'to be born on the

---

a female was primarily something performed by a woman without a husband.

<sup>497</sup> Martin J. Selman, 'The Social Environment of the Patriarchs', *TynBul*, 27 (1976), 114–36 (p. 133).

<sup>498</sup> Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, BZAW, 133 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), pp. 256–57

knees of someone', then, does not specify any particular legal action, but rather is a more general phrase indicating some kind of closer relationship between the child and the one on whose knees the child is (at least symbolically) born.<sup>499</sup>

Stade perhaps goes further than the evidence will allow by suggesting that the origin and meaning of the idiom goes back to the practice of childbirth, but there may be something to it (there may be other explanations for Job 3.12, but this certainly seems to be the easiest reading).<sup>500</sup> It could conceivably have been considered an honour to be the one to receive a baby as it emerged from the mother (this would be in contrast to the Bedouin practice mentioned by Stade, where the husband's presence in the birthing room would have been shameful).<sup>501</sup> Furthermore, the knee imagery, like bosom imagery, is often indicative of maternal care and a special relationship, especially between grandparents/great-grandparents and children (Ruth 4.16), without necessarily referring to an adoption. In Genesis 30.3, the special relationship is not necessarily an emotional one, but an honour-based one—these children are born to her credit.

---

<sup>499</sup> While it is possible that the knee or lap may have been a symbol of the power of procreation, I am not entirely convinced that this fits the idiom. Sarna, p. 208; Matthews, II, 482–83; Waltke, p. 596.

<sup>500</sup> Places like Job 3.12 do not of necessity presuppose or describe a birthing procedure where someone receives a baby from the womb onto his or her lap (rather than describing the sequence in a birthing event, 'knee' and 'breast' may simply be symbols of post-partum care from mother and others, possibly the father). Stade, 143–56 (pp. 154–56), also looks to Exod 1.16, but this requires a textual emendation of האבנים to הברכים without a great deal of evidence other than Syr. (Gr. and Vulg. both avoid the issue, which seems to presuppose MT reading). The phrase could have emerged from hyperbole, or some other semantic evolutionary process, as from any particular birthing practice: 'That child is on my lap so much, he was practically born there.' Regardless of its etymology, the symbolism is what is important.

<sup>501</sup> In such a situation, it would be an honour both for the patriarch as well as the child being born. Potentially, this honour would accompany the privilege of naming the child (Gen 30.3; see also *Odyssey* XIX, 401; Stade, 143–56 (p. 146); Dillmann, p. 457). The honour presumes the right to the honour, that is, it is an honour that the recipient either deserves (50.23) or is legally entitled to (30.3). The child is honoured by having been received and named by the patriarch. This supports, as well, the aetiological understanding of this verse as background for the later prominence of the Machir clan within Manasseh.

The situation in Genesis 50.23, on the other hand, does not match up perfectly with Genesis 30.3. Neither, however, does it with the adoptive situation of Genesis 48. While 50.23 is probably in some sense intended to be parallel with 48.1–12, it is clearly not an adoption.<sup>502</sup> Joseph does not have a separate Promise-related inheritance to give, since his inheritance is entirely found in Manasseh and Ephraim, so adoption as in Genesis 48 would be pointless. Moreover, in 50.23, Joseph does not need the children to be attributed to him in any way that they are not already (as in Genesis 30 with Rachel). They are already building up his house, hence the whole reason for 50.23 to begin with.<sup>503</sup>

Neither is there any reason to suggest that this is somehow a legitimization of the sons of Machir. The same objections to this interpretation of Genesis 48 apply here. There is no compelling reason in the text why the sons of Machir needed to be legitimated, that is, officially recognized as being within the line of inheritance.<sup>504</sup> The only possible reason is that Machir's mother was, according to I Chronicles 7.14, an Aramaean concubine, a detail also found in the Greek of Genesis 46.20. While

---

<sup>502</sup> While both Ruppert (pp. 199–200) and Schmitt (p. 79) view Gen 50.23 as an adoption, each also notes the significant literary differences between 50.23 and 48.12 that mitigate their generally observed parallel relationship. Specifically, as Schmitt points out, the adoption of Gen 48 relates to *Heilsgeschichte*. The same is not so clearly the case in Gen 50.

<sup>503</sup> As mentioned in ch. 3, the view, espoused most recently by de Hoop (pp. 338, 469), that Joseph needs to adopt Machir's sons in order to replace Manasseh and Ephraim who were taken from him by Jacob, completely misunderstands the significance of Jacob's actions in Gen 48 and the nature of adoption in general. De Hoop's purpose in his analysis is to assign the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim to a pro-Judah (as opposed to a pro-Joseph) layer. That he uses this reading (consisting of problems imposed on the text by him, not those inherent in the text) as data for his diachronic investigation aptly illustrates the potential problems of using textual unevenness as evidence of the compositional process. Older proponents of de Hoop's view include Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906), p. 516; Gunkel, p. 487; Procksch, p. 429. Ruppert (pp. 199–200) and Schmitt (p. 79) both reject this view.

<sup>504</sup> Stade, pp. 143–56; R. Davidson, p. 315; B. J. van der Merwe, pp. 221–32 (p. 227); Donner, pp. 87–119. The only meaningful way to use the word 'legitimation' is in reference to an act of recognition of a child's legitimate descent and a status as potential heir. Few are as explicit as van der Merwe, but if this idea does not lie behind numerous other scholars' uses of the word 'legitimation', in English or German, those uses are misleading. Therefore, I treat any use of the word in scholarly literature as connoting this full definition.

neither the MT nor any of the other ancient versions of Genesis 46.20 mention Manasseh's concubine (and no version of Genesis 50.23 does), it is, nevertheless, conceivable that the identity of Machir's mother was so strong a part of the tribal history of Machir that it would be in the mind of the implied reader. This detail can, then, be considered as a possible explanation for a presumed need of Machir's sons for legitimation.<sup>505</sup>

This suggestion, however, fails on several points. If the identity of Manasseh's wife somehow requires an act of recognition for his descendants through her, it cannot be on account of her ethnicity, since Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel are all Aramaeans. It would have to be on account of her social status as concubine. However, if other ancient Near Eastern lawcodes and marriage contracts can be used to establish some kind of precedent, her status as concubine would only be relevant if Manasseh also had sons by another wife, and no record in the OT says clearly that Manasseh had any children by anyone other than this concubine.<sup>506</sup> The passage in I

---

<sup>505</sup> Redford (pp. 248–49) considers the Aramaean connection of the Joseph tribes to be an older tradition in contrast with the Joseph story. The author of Genesis, in this case, is specifically contradicting the older tradition, or in Redford's words, playing 'cavalierly with this long-standing tradition by implying that in fact Ephraim and Manasseh were half-Egyptian.' However, neither Knoppers nor Klein treat I Chr 7.14–17 in this way. Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004), pp. 464–65; Klein, pp. 223–31. Knoppers does consider the Gr. version of Gen 46.20 to be a part of the Chronicler's *Vorlage*, in other words that the earliest form of Genesis probably mentioned Manasseh's Aramaean concubine. This would nullify the contradiction Redford sees between the Joseph story and the Chronicler's tradition for the Joseph tribes. I am neither convinced that the Chronicler's *Vorlage* of Genesis contained the extended form of Gen 46.20 (the difference in wording does not point toward direct dependence), nor that I Chr 7.14–23 contains an older or even a competing history for the Joseph tribes, but the point here is that it is reasonable to presume that Machir's mother's identity is a part of the mental furniture of the implied reader.

<sup>506</sup> Code of Hammurabi §§170–71 are the only example in the law codes of an act of legitimation by the father that is required to raise the status of the sons of a slave-woman (his *amtum*) to the status of heirs. Moreover, this is a special circumstance when the *amtum*'s children are born after those of the first wife. Otherwise, it is typical that, if the first wife bears no children, the children of an *amtum* (or even of a marketplace prostitute, Sumerian *karkid*; see Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode §27) automatically become the man's heirs. This appears to be the presupposed norm in marriage contracts with stipulations limiting the inheritance rights of the children of an *amtum* in case the formerly barren wife subsequently bears children.

Chronicles 7.14–18 is difficult and may be corrupt. There are many different reconstructions of what it may say or may have originally said. In any case, no other wife is explicitly mentioned, so one can only with caution point to I Chronicles 7.14 as evidence of other wives. But assuming Manasseh did indeed have sons by a full wife, it still is not clear that Israelite custom required the legitimation of these sons, since Genesis earlier mentions no legitimation of Dan, Naphtali, Gad, or Asher. Their right to inherit alongside their half-brothers by Leah and Rachel is never questioned in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>507</sup> Even if legitimation were needed, it would most likely be Machir himself and not Machir's sons that would need to be officially recognized or legitimated, since it was Machir's mother whose identity is problematic. And if for some reason Machir's sons did need to be legitimated, it is still not clear why the great-grandfather would be the one to do it. If Machir's sons needed to be legitimated, Machir is the one to do so; if Machir needed to be legitimated, then Manasseh is the one. Except in the case of adoption, ancient Near Eastern legal texts do not reveal that a grandfather's recognition has any impact on inheritance issues—only the father has this authority.<sup>508</sup> All of this makes the interpretation of the sons of Machir being 'born upon the knees of Joseph' as a recognition of their legitimate

---

<sup>507</sup> By Jacob, at least. ancient Near Eastern law only shows a concern for recognition by the father as impacting upon inheritance issues; once again see Code of Hammurabi §§170–71

<sup>508</sup> An act of 'recognition' that does not impact upon inheritance is, as far as I can tell, a category invented by modern scholarship, or at least a sociological category rather than a legal one (admittedly, the distinction between sociological and legal is blurry, particularly in an oral culture). While Stade's article remains an important part of the scholarly dialogue on the issue of adoption versus legitimation in Genesis, he unfortunately confuses these categories when he discusses supposed acts of recognition by the grandfather. An official legitimation is something that would impact upon the child's inheritance status. An act of recognition by a grandfather such as Stade describes has nothing to do with inheritance, but is simply an informal welcoming ritual, such as family members holding a baby for the first time as practised today. Stade, 143–56. The use of the Roman legal concept *patria potestas* by Donner and others is misleading as a background for a grandfather's role in legitimation. We must look to ancient Near Eastern law first, where only recognition by the father is mentioned, even if older patriarchs did possess a good deal of sociological and legal authority over their descendants. See Christopher J. H. Wright, 'Family', *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 761–69 (p. 767), for a caution about the application of the *patria potestas* concept to Israelite family law.



descent from him essentially impossible, unless special customs regarding inheritance are at work which are borne witness to nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible or the ancient Near East.<sup>509</sup>

Historically, scholarship has assumed that the specific meaning of an idiomatic expression in one place must also be its specific meaning in another place. When that specific meaning fits well in one context but not in another (as is almost always the case), this was seen as evidence of (only partially-successful) editorial activity. But this assumption is the phrasal version of what Barr, in relation to the semantics of individual words, called ‘illegitimate totality transfer’ (p. 218). An idiom, like an individual word, can exhibit great flexibility. We cannot assume that what appears to be an imperfect fit of an idiom in a context reveals anything other than our readerly incompetence. As mentioned above with regard to the phrase in Genesis 30.3, the phrase itself does not connote anything so specific as adoption, legitimation, or recognition. Instead, knee-imagery is more vague and more flexible, being used in the context of several different situations, all of which have to do with showing a special connection, emotional or legal, between the owner of the knee and the child on or near it.<sup>510</sup>

---

<sup>509</sup> In relation to Gen 48, Scharbert suggests that the fact that Manasseh and Ephraim were born outside of the land necessitates Jacob’s adoption of them if they are to have any claim to an inheritance in the land (supposedly a concern of P). If this were indeed the motivation behind the events of ch. 48, one could apply this same principle to 50.23 in order to make sense of it as an adoption. However, seeing that all of Jacob’s sons except for Benjamin were born outside the land but were not likewise adopted by Isaac (at least not in the text of Gen 35.27–29—also a P text) shows that Scharbert’s justification for the adoption in ch. 48 can only be maintained if one posits a disagreement between P and JE (ch. 30) over the location of the births of the sons of Jacob. Furthermore, in the final form of Genesis this hypothetical disagreement would actually have been reconciled in favour of JE’s version rather than that of P, which would be odd indeed. There is no evidence that the place of one’s birth has any impact upon inheritance issues in Genesis. Josef Scharbert, *Genesis*, NEchtB, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Echter, 1986), II, p. 287.

<sup>510</sup> Sarna, p. 351. As Stade (143–56 (p. 145)), observes regarding Gen 30.3, even if the phrase refers to adoption, it ‘ist doch wenig wahrscheinlich, dass damit der volle Bedeutungsumfang dieser Phrase gefunden worden ist.’

Therefore, in Genesis 50.23, whether the idiomatic expression ‘born on the knees of Joseph’ refers to a literal practice or not (and it may very well), the significance of that act/phrase for the narrative and for the character of Joseph can be seen in three other, non-mutually-exclusive effects. The first reason Machir’s sons are ‘born upon the knees of Joseph’ relates more to the world of the implied reader—the notice is aetiological, explaining in a way the prominence of the Machir clan in subsequent history. At times in the Hebrew Bible the people groups associated with Machir (and with his son Gilead) are so prominent as to seem of equal status with a full tribe, or they may even function as alternate names for the tribe of Manasseh (or at least the eastern half-tribe). The fact of some kind of close connection between Joseph and Machir’s sons anticipates this later significance (and thus ties this story in with the aetiological blessing stories in Genesis 48 and 49).<sup>511</sup>

The second reason for including the notice relates more to the world of the text. Joseph’s involvement in the birth of Machir’s sons is a detail that contributes to the depiction of his life and death as blessed. In its vagueness, the idiom ילד על-ברך may also imply active involvement or enjoyment of his great-grandchildren. Several occurrences of the noun ברך, where the anatomical term is a primarily a symbolic space rather than a joint in the leg, show that the knees or lap as a location has strong maternal connotations, emphasizing the act of caring or soothing (e.g. Judges 16.19; II Kings 4.20; Isaiah 66.12). Many commentators also point to Ruth 4.16 as a parallel situation (which lacks the term ברך but instead uses the closely related anatomical term חיק), where the point is not only Naomi’s identification with the child as hers in some way, but her active involvement in the child’s upbringing as his אִמָּנוּת or primary caretaker.<sup>512</sup> Outside of the Hebrew Bible, the Akkadian phrase *šarru bēlī mārmaṛešu ina burkiešu lintuḥu*—‘may my lord the king lift his grandchildren into his

<sup>511</sup> So Van Seters, p. 324, though he overstates the significance slightly.

<sup>512</sup> Matthews, II, p. 929; Weinfeld, p. 319.

lap',<sup>513</sup> expresses the same concept through knee/lap (if in a different idiom). This kind of activity shows vigour into Joseph's late life, a death-bed motif in itself.<sup>514</sup> Not only does Joseph 'see' his great-grandsons before he dies, he plays an active role in their lives, or at least in their birth.<sup>515</sup>

The third reason is literary-aesthetic. In general, Genesis employs a technique of imitation from one generation to another in order to show spiritual continuity.<sup>516</sup> In several details, the death of Joseph specifically parallels that of Jacob. The adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim is a very significant event in the death-bed story of Jacob. The birth of Machir's sons on Joseph's knees on one level simply ties his story in with Jacob's that much more closely (through the common 'knee' motif) and shows the meaningfulness and blessedness of one life/death continuing into that of a subsequent generation. Not only do we find parallel events and details among the patriarchs, but there is also something of a progression. This is the first time one of the characters in the Patriarchal History is said to have seen his great-grandchildren. In the reconstructed chronology of Genesis, Abraham would have been able to see his grandsons, Esau and Jacob (even though this meeting is not narrated). Jacob returns to Isaac with many sons, and in the reconstructed chronology it is likely that

---

<sup>513</sup> ABL 178 r. 5 and a similar phrase in ABL 406 r. 14. See *CAD*, II, 256.

<sup>514</sup> In certain obvious places (Gen 25.1–6 and Deut 34.7; also Isaac's unexpectedly long life after chs. 27–28), unusual physical vigour in late life, witnessed within the boundaries of a conventional death-bed story, plays an explicit role. Related but more subtle are the numerous ways dying characters are shown to have mental vigour in the face of death, as when a physically weak character sits up or takes control of a situation (Gen 48.2; 1 Kgs 1.28).

<sup>515</sup> Driver (p. 399) and Speiser (p. 376) both bring out this nuance.

<sup>516</sup> As a few examples: (1) what few 'Isaac' stories there are clearly parallel stories in the Abraham section; (2) the phrasing of Isaac's death notice follows Abraham's nearly exactly; (3) Jacob's journey to seek a wife parallels the betrothal story of Isaac and Rebekah in Gen 24; (4) Joseph's journey away from the Promised Land is, at the same time, an imitation of Jacob's travels and an echo of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt in Gen 12. This strategy actually begins in the Primeval Prologue, as in the re-use of creation language in the flood story and in various parts of the Patriarchal narrative (a commonly noted feature, but see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (London: T & T Clark, 2011) for a recent in-depth treatment).

Isaac lived long enough to know his great-grandsons.<sup>517</sup> Jacob explicitly comments on the blessedness of seeing his own grandsons (48.11). Only of Joseph, though, is it said explicitly that he saw his great-grandsons (and maybe his great-great-grandsons). So the progression is as follows: Implied Grandson (Abraham), Implied Grandson and Great-Grandson (Isaac), Explicit Grandson (Jacob), Explicit Grandson and Great-Grandson (Joseph). Joseph is, by this reckoning, a beneficiary not only of an enduring Promise, but of an increasing one, as well.<sup>518</sup>

In summary, the Preparation of Joseph's death-bed story is made up of four motifs: a summary of remaining life, an age-at-death report (implying an approaching death), a notice of numerous descendants, and an implication of vigour throughout life. The birth of Machir's sons on the knees of Joseph is parallel to Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim, but it is not itself an adoption. Rather, this idiom and knee/lap imagery more generally have a vaguer significance that applies to the three very different situations in Genesis 30.3, 48, and 50.23. It either indicates some sort of close relationship between Joseph and the sons of Machir or that Joseph was the one honoured with receiving the children when they were born. In either case, the focal point is the blessed death of Joseph.

## 6.5.2 THE TESTAMENT (GENESIS 50.24–25)

24 ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אנכי מת ואלהים פקד יפקד אתכם והעלה אתכם מן-הארץ הזאת  
אל-הארץ אשר נשבע לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב: 25 וישבע יוסף את-בני ישראל לאמר פקד יפקד  
אלהים אתכם והעלתם את-עצמתי מזה:

<sup>517</sup> Isaac's death comes in the 280th year after the birth of Abraham, and the migration to Egypt would have come in the 290th year, at which point Joseph was about 39 (seven years of plenty plus two years of famine (Gen 45.6) after he initially stands before Pharaoh at age 30 (Gen 41.46)). This puts Joseph's birth around the 251st year.

<sup>518</sup> Numerological analysis of the final ages of the four chief characters of Gen 12–50 also shows a progression/connection. See n. 95 (section 2.1).

**24** And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am dying, but God will surely visit you and bring you up from this land to the land that he promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ **25** And Joseph bound the sons of Israel by an oath and said, ‘When God visits you, take up my bones from here.’

Joseph’s last words are made up of two statements and two narrative motifs. In the Testament part of this story, the narrative tempo shifts from summary to scene. The first motif is the speech introduction **וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אַחָיו**. The important feature here is the presence of Joseph’s **אָחִים** at the giving of his Testament, pointing to the abiding reconciliation achieved between Joseph and his brothers—peace where there had been strife. Fraternal strife/reconciliation is a recurring theme in Genesis that is closely related to the reversal of primogeniture theme (Cain/Abel; line of Cain/line of Seth; Ham/Shem & Japheth; Ishmael/Isaac; Esau/Jacob; brothers/Joseph). This theme undergoes a gradual transformation toward reconciliation. Ishmael and Isaac bury Abraham together. Esau and Jacob bury Isaac together, and Esau’s relents in his intention to kill Jacob. The two are not, however, united into a single community. With Joseph and his brothers, the theme reaches full reconciliation. They bury Jacob together, all plans of violence are given up, and the two parties become a single community.<sup>519</sup>

Another aspect of this detail is the symbolic space of close proximity to the Testator, the presence of Joseph’s **אָחִים** as he gives his final words. We are likely justified in going so far as to imagine Joseph’s kinsmen being present beside Joseph’s actual death-bed. This is not absolutely vital. The final words of Moses, Elijah, and probably Joshua are not given from a bed. Nevertheless, in Genesis, final words are elsewhere clearly given from a death-bed.<sup>520</sup>

---

<sup>519</sup> B. Jacob, p. 342. The broader sense of **אָחִים** as ‘kinsmen’ is probably intended here. Wenham, II, p. 491; Dillmann, p. 457; Driver, p. 399. Even so, the fact that those present at Joseph’s death-bed, who likely include the sons and grandsons of his brothers, are called **אָחִים** still recalls the theme of fraternal reconciliation. Matthews, II, p. 929.

<sup>520</sup> See sections 2.3, 3.1, and 5.3 on bed imagery.

Significantly, Joseph is the initiator (if nothing else, implied by the lack of preceding dialogue). Considering this text in isolation, Joseph's initiative is masked by the brevity of the scene. In comparison with other death-bed stories, however, the initiative of the dying character is more apparent, such that a mere speech introduction motif in this position strongly implies the more explicit summoning motif of other death-bed stories. The show of initiative by the Testator shows mental acuity—a feature of a noble death—and it is found in other death-bed stories.<sup>521</sup>

Joseph's speech contains two important elements. First, he announces his approaching death. While the age-at-death motif of the Preparation implies Joseph's approaching death, Joseph himself expressly confirms the significance of this moment in time, *אָנֹכִי מֵת*.<sup>522</sup> In the context of other death-bed scenes, it is noteworthy that an initial statement or even a repetition of an approaching death motif is very common especially (but not exclusively) at the beginning of a dying character's Testament.<sup>523</sup> It is significant that Joseph is depicted as being aware of his approaching death. Awareness at the time of one's death was part of an ideal death in the Greek opinion,<sup>524</sup> quite unlike modern ideas about dying in one's sleep. It appears that the Hebrews felt as the Greeks did in this matter. Joseph's announcement of his own coming death lends the death a kind of intentionality (although, this is within the

---

<sup>521</sup> See esp. section 3.1.

<sup>522</sup> The predicative participle here is equally capable of expressing either a telic present progressive if death is depicted both as a process and a conclusion, or an imminent future if death is depicted as a moment in time (without the process leading up to it). Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 79–82; Joüon §§121 *c–e*; *IBHS* §37.6 *f*. In either case, the imminence of death is the salient feature.

<sup>523</sup> Gen 27.2; 48.21; 49.29; Deut 32.50; Josh 23.14; 1 Kgs 2.2; Tob 14.11.

<sup>524</sup> Modern sensibilities place a higher priority on the good (that is, painless) death than on the noble death, so that the painless and peaceful death while sleeping is seen to be an ideal way to die. But ancients felt that to die unaware in one's sleep was one of the worst ways to die. It was better to meet death face on. See Gittings, 'Good Death', pp. 210–11.

parameters of a naturally occurring death, not one by one's own hand, which is seen as unnatural or premature<sup>525</sup>).

The rest of Joseph's statement in verse 24 consists of a prediction or prophecy that God will visit the Israelites and bring them back to the land he had promised. Matthews (II, 929) notes the fact that Jacob's and Moses' deaths (in Genesis 48.21 and Deuteronomy 4.22) are also framed in anticipation of the coming entry into the Promised Land. However, what is significant from the perspective of conventional story-forms is not the content of the prophecy but the presence of prophecy in the story. Death-bed scenes provide a typical and powerful setting for important predictions/prophecies.<sup>526</sup>

The second part of Joseph's Testament is another speech unit. This one is preceded by the imposition of an oath (וַיִּשְׁבַּע<sup>527</sup>) on the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. The sons of Israel may be intended to be identical with Joseph's אֲחִים,<sup>528</sup> but if אֲחִיו refers only to a more limited group, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל may include all those connected with Jacob.<sup>529</sup> This

---

<sup>525</sup> For some discussion of the ideas of good and bad death, and of prematurity as a factor in a bad death, see Bailey, pp. 47–61; Neumann-Gorsolke, pp. 111–36; Leuenberger, pp. 151–76; Dietrich, pp. 177–98.

<sup>526</sup> If blessings are counted with prophecies within the broader category of oracular death-bed speech, most of the other conventional death-bed stories I have identified contain a prediction or prophecy: Abraham (Gen 24.7); Isaac (27.27–29, 39b–40); Jacob (48.15–21, 49.2–27); Moses (Deut 33.1–29); Elijah (II Kgs 2.10); Elisha (II Kgs 13.15–19); Mattathias (I Macc 2.62–66); Tobit (Tob 14.4–7); numerous instances throughout the *T. 12 Patr.* The oracular quality of II Sam 23.1–7 is why, for example, Alter compares it with Gen 49.1–27, categorising both, apparently under the type-scene 'The Testament of the Dying Hero'. This passage lacks conventional story framing, but the motif of a dying hero uttering something prophetic lies behind it. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 51; id., *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 282.

<sup>527</sup> Hiphil of שָׁבַע, as in Gen 24.3. The Niphal form shows up in Jacob's death story in 47.31.

<sup>528</sup> Driver, p. 399; Matthews, II, p. 930; Wenham, II, p. 491.

<sup>529</sup> Lunn, pp. 161–79 (p. 170). Jacob's death-bed story also shows a progression in the addressee from small group or individual to a larger group from one Testament or Episode to the next. So does Abraham's, if 25.1–6 is considered a second Episode, and if the sons of Qeturah are considered the addressees. On the other hand, while the first Episode of David's death-bed story shows a progression from single (I Kgs 1.28–31) to plural addressee (vv. 32–37), the second Episode narrows to Solomon alone as addressee. There does not, then, appear to be an overriding conventional flow one way or the other.

might, then, depict all of Israel as Joseph's corporate Worthy Successors (as also with Moses and Joshua).<sup>530</sup>

As discussed in chapter 2, the oath motif is significant for the dying character as an assurance of actions to be carried out posthumously. The peace of mind of the dying character (knowing all is in order) is an important feature of a blessed death.

The last motif, the second speech itself, is Joseph's final wishes, more specifically his burial instructions. Final wishes, probably the most obvious and expected feature of a death-bed story, concern something for which the dying character needs some sort of resolution before dying in order for his house to be properly put in order. As mentioned in previous chapters, burial instructions are found only in Jacob's and Joseph's death-bed stories, and this is because of their particular circumstances, i.e. dying outside the land.

The fact that, as brief as this death-bed story is, its Testament content is two-part interestingly recalls the tendency of longer death-bed stories to be divided into multiple Episodes, each usually with its own theme and addressee. Different death-bed speech-acts are usually separated by some kind of narration, in this case very minimal narration.

In summary, then, Joseph's Testament is thoroughly conventional, containing a summoning/speech introduction, an approaching death motif, a prediction, an oath-imposition and Joseph's final wishes in the form of burial instructions. The characters involved are Joseph and his kinsmen who are imagined as being near Joseph as he gives his last words. His Testament is given in two parts, each part having its own purpose (and possibly addressee).

---

<sup>530</sup> With all of the speculation about this story's real world political setting, exalting either the Northern or the Southern Kingdom, could this not be interpreted as demonstrating a reconciling agenda in post 722 BCE Judah?



## 6.5.3 THE DENOUEMENT (GENESIS 50.26)

26 וימת יוסף בן־מאה ועשר שנים ויחנטו אתו וישים בארון במצרים:

26 Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old. And they embalmed him, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

This is a simple and typical Denouement. The tempo shifts back to summary as the narrative presents three motifs: the death of the character, a repetition of the character's age at death, and a burial motif. The death motif is straight-forward: וימת יוסף. The character's age is repeated, but this time not in order to move present story time forward.<sup>531</sup> When mentioned in the immediate context of the Testator's death, the Testator's age comments upon the character and his legacy, typically celebrating his long life.<sup>532</sup>

The manner in which Joseph's age is related differs from that in verse 22. Whereas verse 22 follows very closely the phrasing of the chosen-line genealogy, here not only does the total age notice follow the death notice (reversed from the chosen-line structure), but the phrase is different. The 'son of [X] years' age formula is used a frequently for the first element ('age before significant event' or repeated chronological data in the longer sections), as in 5.32; 7.6; 11.10; 12.4; 16.16; 17.1; 17.24; 21.4 (referring to Isaac), 5; 25.20; 25.26; 37.2 and 41.46 (both referring to

<sup>531</sup> Early twentieth-century source-critics took this duplication as a doublet and posited some isolated J material in v. 22: for example, Gunkel, p. 440; Procksch, pp. 286, 426. See also Westermann (III, p. 235) whose understanding of two originally distinct units is apparently partly due to the duplicated age notice. Matthews (II, p. 928) understands the duplicate age motifs as an *inclusio*. This may be, but even so the two notices do accomplish two distinct things as narrator speech-acts. Furthermore, the use of the age detail as an *inclusio* is not conventional. The duplication of the age motif is not a feature of Abraham's, Isaac's or Jacob's death-bed stories, or in fact any death-bed story outside Genesis except for that of Moses in Deut 31–34 (31.2 and 34.7), which is far more complex and more clearly made up of disparate material edited together.

<sup>532</sup> Multiple sources show 110 years to be the Egyptian ideal life span. One example is found in John A. Wilson, trans., 'The Instruction of the Vizier Ptah-Hotep', in *ANET*, pp. 412–14 (p. 414). The Egyptian flavour of the Joseph story has been thoroughly explored by Vergote (esp. pp. 200–201 for the age of 110 years), and others, but Hamilton (II, 709–10) urges some caution in light of the fact that the 110 years can be explained numerologically.

Joseph within *Toledot Jacob* and among the many elements making 37.2–50.26 a combined story).<sup>533</sup> This idiom is never otherwise used in Genesis for the final element.<sup>534</sup> What the effect would be on the implied reader is uncertain. Is its uniqueness too conspicuous to attribute to random aesthetic variation? It seems likely that this break in the pattern, whatever its origin,<sup>535</sup> would be noticed as a distinction between Joseph and the others in the chosen-line (he is already distinct in not being exclusive—he shares the honour with his brothers). Rather than simply being a random variation, perhaps this change in pattern produces a sense of closure for the implied reader.

The very fact of Joseph's post-mortem embalming and burial in a coffin, not its specific details, is the most immediately important feature of the burial motif from the perspective of repetitive conventions, since the coffin is not intended to be a permanent resting place. This provisional burial makes the Joseph death-bed story unique, in that in a sense it is not completely resolved until much later in the canonical Hebrew Bible.<sup>536</sup> Joseph's bones and the carrying out of Joseph's last wishes are mentioned in Exodus 13.19, and the conclusion to Joshua mentions the burial of Joseph's bones in the Promised Land, in a way forming an *inclusio* with Genesis 50.25 (Joseph and Joshua both die at 110 years of age, as well). From an important editorial perspective, Genesis through Joshua do actually form a Hexateuch (even if this probably does not accurately reflect the compositional history of the constituent books).<sup>537</sup> Furthermore, other death-bed scenes, like those of Abraham (Genesis 24.1–25.11), Isaac (Genesis 27–35), and Joshua (Joshua

---

<sup>533</sup> Other uses of then idiom are found in 17.12, 17, 25 (perhaps an intentionally misleading usage referring to Ishmael); and 26.34 (as with Ishmael, so with Esau).

<sup>534</sup> It is not unparalleled in non-Genesis death-bed stories, though. The idiom is used in at the beginning of Moses' death-bed story in Deut 31.2, but also at the end in connection with his death in 34.7. It is also found in Josh 24.29 which also parallels 50.26 in the age itself (110 years).

<sup>535</sup> Rendtorff (*Problem*, p. 163) attributes it to a later layer of reworking based on this detail.

<sup>536</sup> Wenham, II, p. 491.

13–24), are divided to frame substantial related narrative material between the first and last elements. However, unlike other divided death-bed scenes, all the content which occurs between the framing elements (in this case Exodus 1.1 through Joshua 24.31) does not specifically pertain to Joseph's final wishes. In one sense, one could argue all the intervening content does pertain to Joseph's total Testament (including the prediction of God's visitation), but even so the content is just too varied. Also, this situation differs from, for example, Isaac's or Joshua's death-bed story, in that in both of those situations the character dies after the intervening material, whereas Joseph dies and is provisionally buried in a coffin before the intervening material. In light of this, Joseph's prediction and his burial wishes are better understood as a prolepsis, with Joshua 24.32–33 being an aesthetically pleasing and theologically significant recall which concludes the entry into Canaan in a satisfactory way. The burial in the coffin is intended simultaneously to bring this story to a sufficient conclusion, despite the fact that Joseph's final wishes have not been fulfilled, and to look ahead to the following Exodus, wilderness, and conquest narratives.<sup>538</sup> The oath of verse 25 supplies the necessary missing element: the assurance of fulfilment. Because of the oath, Genesis 50.22–26 can be seen as a closed unit, with Joshua 24.32–33 being a recall.

Why is 50.26 included in this story? Why is it needed for the narrative?

While individual stories tend to end with some sort of narrative conclusion, literary units are shown elsewhere to be able to end with dialogue without a narrator's punchline (for example, Genesis 14.24; 18.15; 34.31). The effect of this technique,

---

<sup>537</sup> Römer writes, 'The most decisive argument for the existence of a Hexateuch is Josh 24 [...] Joshua 24 [...] recapitulates all major events from the days of the patriarchs to the conquest of the land.' Thomas Römer, 'How Many Books (Teuchs): Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Deuteronomistic History, or Enneateuch?', in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?: Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings*, ed. by Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid, *Ancient Israel and Its Literature*, 8 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), pp. 25–42 (p. 30).

<sup>538</sup> The view of Lunn, 161–79 (pp. 178–79), is similar.

especially in 34.31, appears to be to create an open-ended question, to raise some issue for the reader to work through in retrospect. Certainly, if the primary purpose of 50.22–26 is simply to bridge the gap between Genesis and Exodus,<sup>539</sup> could not a conclusion on dialogue accomplish this, perhaps even better because of its open-endedness? Surely the reader can assume that Joseph did eventually die and his bones were preserved somewhere. In light of the shape of other death-bed stories, the answer to why is quite simply that once Joseph's impending death was announced, the story was not perceived to be finished until his death was narrated. The whole thing comes as a conventional package, a type-scene. Based on the typical shape of other death-bed stories, it appears that without the narration of death and burial, Joseph has not really died 'appropriately.' Particularly in the case of deaths, some kind of resolution appears to be needed in order to be satisfying to the implied reader as a death-bed story of a blessed character.<sup>540</sup>

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

Comparison of the three narrative segments of Genesis 50.1–26 with other death-bed stories shows that they are not vestigial but are, in fact, part of the overall conventional plot-structure. Several death-bed stories include an extended Denouement after one of the Episodes (especially the last one), containing between two and five different stories. These stories relate events wherein the dying character is not the central acting character, but the concerns expressed by the dying character,

---

<sup>539</sup> Westermann, III, pp. 237–38.

<sup>540</sup> Note, for example, a significant male character in Genesis whose death is not related: Lot, the original heir-apparent for Abraham. Lot's end is in a cave having fathered two children through his own daughters (exceedingly shameful), and ... that is it. There is no death narrated for Lot. We do not really need one. He has become irrelevant. But even worse, he has become disqualified as the bearer of blessing to the world. How or when he dies no longer matters—he is a thoroughly disgraced character. On the other hand, it seems to have been felt necessary that blessed characters, heroes, have their deaths narrated or reported to some extent.

especially as they relate to his or her blessed death, are resolved. The burial of Jacob in 50.1–14 is an unusually elaborate burial scene, but many elements, including the mourning motif (by the Worthy Successor and by a nation), prove to be conventional. The confirmation of fraternal reconciliation in 50.15–21 is an outworking of a common theme in Epilogue narratives, namely the survival of the dying character's legacy. Joseph's short death scene is analysable both as a constituent element of Jacob's death and as conventional death-bed narrative in itself. As part of Jacob's death-bed story, it relates the survival and prosperity of at least one part of Jacob's progeny and also reiterates the promise of the land, which is of central importance to the death of Jacob but which is not yet realized. As a conventional death-bed story of its own, despite its brevity it has, like other death-bed stories, an identifiable three part structure (Preparation, Testament, and Denouement).

# 7 CONCLUSION

---

## 7.0 SUMMARY

This book has covered a lot of ground, so it will be helpful first of all to summarize the conclusions of the last six chapters and then to try to synthesize them.

In chapter one I argued that Biblical scholarship has not, for the most part, paid sufficient attention to conventional structures, particularly with regard to Jacob's death-bed story at the end of Genesis. Most critical biblical study has historically looked for unevenness in the final form that could be used to unearth the documents or traditions lying behind the present text. However, in the last half century or so, with the rise of text- and reader-oriented approaches in the study of literature in general, synchronic studies of biblical texts have grown in popularity and credibility. Unfortunately, most synchronic studies seeking to demonstrate the sense and coherence of the final form have relied almost exclusively on basic logical structures occurring within the text under consideration. This leaves such analyses open to charges of undue subjectivity. In other cases, texts have been analysed and classified according to non-mutually-exclusive (and generally *etic*) categories. A more fruitful and defensible approach derived complex conventional and repetitive structures from the texts themselves by comparing large numbers of texts. Much of what I argue finds a correlation in the work of Vladimir Propp, especially *The Morphology of the Folktale*. In this book, I have focused on the patterns underlying death-bed stories in the Hebrew Bible and various other Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical texts. Jacob's

death-bed story begins recognizably following this pattern in Genesis 47.28, and it continues all the way through 50.26. This section of Genesis subdivides into four Episodes (a sequence of Preparation, Testament, and Denouement) the last of which has an extended conclusion I call an Epilogue.

In chapter two I have shown that Genesis 47.28–31 is a conventional unit with a unified chronology, both despite the traditional diachronic division between verses 28 and 29 and against the lingering suggestion of a second shorter competing timeline underlying the non-P material. The change in name for Jacob has a rationale that is consistent even in Genesis before the Joseph story: Jacob is his name, Israel is either a marked name or a title whose specific significance is that it designates whatever actions done in its name as inheritance-related or national in scope. In addition to conventional death-bed story structuring, a comparison of the phrasing here with the chosen line genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 shows that Jacob's death-bed story is also an elaboration of the word *יוֹמֵת*. Joseph is depicted here and elsewhere as Jacob's Worthy Successor. The Worthy Successor is one of four roles taken by characters in death-bed stories (the other three being the Testator, the Agent, and the Unworthy Competitor). In laying an oath on Joseph regarding the carrying out of his burial wishes, Jacob assumes Joseph's role as Worthy Successor without formally selecting him. Furthermore, in bowing to Joseph, Jacob not only fulfils the last part of the dream from Genesis 37, but he also unbalances the death-bed story. For Jacob to die an ideal death, he must be honoured and exalted, but he has humbled himself to Joseph. These two features, the giving of executor duties to Joseph without a formal selection and the bowing of Jacob to Joseph in gratitude, make this unit incomplete in itself. It requires something more to balance it.

That something more is discussed in chapter three. After the Preparation, this Episode divides into three sub-units, mini-Episodes that are unified by their common

theme (the blessing of Joseph) and setting in narrated time (there is no ellipsis or significant pause separating the sub-units from each other). The first mini-Episode is an adoption ceremony structured much like a covenant initiation event found elsewhere. The ritual aspects of the language and actions gives compelling explanations for the relevance of the historical review in 48.3–7, Jacob's question as to the identity of Joseph's sons, Joseph's wordy answer, and the significances of the kiss and embrace, Jacob's speech in verse 11, and the situation of Manasseh and Ephraim by Jacob's knees. Despite important objections raised by Donner against seeing this passage as an adoption ritual, the preponderance of evidence is in favour of 'adoption' being a ready category in the mind of the implied reader and it being the best understanding of 48.3–12. The adoption of Joseph's sons by Jacob accomplishes the formal selection of Joseph as his Worthy Successor (by giving him the double portion of the inheritance), rebalancing the executor duties given him in the previous Episode. Joseph's bowing to Jacob likewise rebalances the sense of honour, putting Jacob back on top. The second mini-Episode is a blessing given to Joseph through his sons. Since elsewhere blessings are only given to heirs, this blessing depends on the adoption ritual for its legitimacy. Despite some grammatical complexities, 48.13–20 can be read as a single and intentional sub-unit. In connection with 48.13–20, the final sub-unit, verses 21–22, complete the non-P Patriarchal Promise pattern found throughout Genesis.

The third Episode is the chiasmic counterpart of the second: the blessing of the Twelve. Here, all twelve sons are depicted as Worthy co-Successors of Jacob. Even though much of the content of the oracle is not really what we would generally understand as 'blessing' the narrator's characterization of it as a blessing makes it so, as far as the conventional death-bed structure is concerned. Genesis 49.28 is the climax of the Episode and of Genesis as a whole, being the first formal presentation



of the twelve sons as the twelve tribes. It is a full pause in narrative tempo, containing a good deal of repetitive and otherwise not strictly necessary verbiage. Longacre calls this ‘rhetorical underlining’.<sup>541</sup> Taking the following Episode and Epilogue into consideration, the occurrences of the names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ in this death-bed story group themselves in a pattern that is different from but complementary to the chiasmic pattern of the four Episodes created by the combination of their addressees and themes. All of this together is too structured to be accidental, even if the patterns do originate in the text’s constituent documents or traditions.

The fourth Episode is the chiasmic counterpart for the first: the burial request to the twelve. Once again, whereas before Joseph alone (or Joseph and his sons) was depicted as the Worthy Successor, here all twelve sons are depicted as co-Successors given executor duties. The Testament recalls Abraham’s purchase of the cave and field of Machpelah in Genesis 23, and its specialized vocabulary and emphatic phrasing reveal an interest in legal precision. Jacob’s death is communicated through a piling up of essentially synonymous terms whose only distinction is probably one of register.

The Epilogue, Genesis 50.1–26, is not separated from the fourth Episode by narrated time, despite the fact that 49.33 and 50.1 are traditionally thought to be from different strata. Joseph returns to being the focalizing character, though the other eleven are not forgotten. He is thus depicted as the first among equals, both a tiered and a corporate Succession being found in other death-bed stories as well as this one. The three stories all concern events that maintain the honour and blessedness of Jacob’s death after he has died (proper and honourable burial, the survival of his legacy, the long life and blessedness of his son). The third story is, in fact, a

---

<sup>541</sup> Longacre, *Grammar*, p. 39.

conventional death-bed story in its own right. Other death-bed stories also act as framework narratives for other significant and even conventionally-shaped narratives.

## 7.1 SYNTHESIS

The essential discovery and claim of this thesis is fivefold: 1) the structure of the death-bed story of Jacob in Genesis 47.28–50.26 is consistent with the structures of other death-bed stories in the Hebrew Bible (this pattern is also found in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature); 2) one can also find many places where Jacob's death-bed story reflects other conventional and complex repetitive structuring, in addition to less complex logical structuring; 3) awareness of conventional and repetitive structuring makes most of the diachronic explanations for enigmatic features of this text unnecessary or even unlikely; 4) this method is also a corrective for certain weaknesses in much synchronic study, in particular its almost exclusive reliance on basic logical structures in structural analysis and its extreme subjectivity; 5) when combined with a careful investigation of its grammatical and narratological features, this story's conventional structuring reveals an organic coherence that can only be considered intentional. If we assume traditional diachronic divisions of this text, the artistry of the final composer becomes even more impressive.

The first two points were sufficiently reviewed in the summary section above. A few comments concerning the last three points, however, are in order. First, it is not my claim that the discovery of a conventional or otherwise complex structuring rationale in the final form of Jacob's death-bed story disproves any diachronic theory. It does, however, call into question the foundation of much diachronic analysis that has been put forward in biblical studies over the years. It is very important that diachronic investigation be based on legitimate unevenness emerging from

competent readings of the text. What is a legitimate unevenness? Practically speaking, it is one that a competent reader perceives and that a community of competent readers verifies. But there always remains the possibility that someone may produce a better reading of a text that obviates the prevailing diachronic theory. How, then, can we ever know for certain that a diachronic theory is valid without textual evidence? In short, we cannot. This is an epistemological problem that cannot be overcome, but it does not invalidate the logical or operational priority of synchronic over diachronic.

Second, on the other side of the methodological coin, commentators approaching the text synchronically need to have overall higher standards for their research. While basic logical structures are valid and important (I have used them in this book), they are also dangerously subjective. How does one build a case for the rationale of the final form based on these kinds of structures? Bar-Efrat and Walsh point the way toward a more rigorous use of logical structures, but the search for more complex structures, especially conventional structures, is what is needed to infuse synchronic analyses with a higher degree of objectivity and credibility.<sup>542</sup> Form-based patterns derived from the text rather than imposed upon it—found through a comparison of the text's form with a large number of other texts and refined through multiple readings—require more work of the analyst, but they produce a sounder argument for the sense of the final form. Where scholars have looked for complex structures, their work has generally been sound.

Third, with regard to Jacob's death-bed story, it is clear that, whatever sources or traditions lie behind the present form of the text, the hand responsible for the final form has exerted a transformational influence on his material. The conventional structuring is often on a level that transcends the boundaries between two different

---

<sup>542</sup> Bar-Efrat, 'Observations', 154–73; Walsh, *Style and Structure*.

supposed diachronic layers. Genesis 47.28 may be P and 29–30 non-P, but they work together as a single death-bed Episode. Indeed, verses 28 (P) and 29a (non-P) work together as a single Preparation section. Though 48.3–7 is typically attributed to P, it is inextricable from and absolutely necessary to its current setting, being the historical prologue of a conventional covenant initiation ritual. Genesis 48.21–22 probably come from a different tradition than the rest of chapter 48, but only when combined with verses 13–20 do they apply all four elements of the non-P Patriarchal Promise to Joseph. Genesis 50.1 (non-P) follows on to 49.33 (P) in a way that it cannot really have followed onto any other part of the story that we have (Genesis 47.31 cannot be a euphemism for Jacob's death). Likewise, 50.12–13 contribute something to 50.1–14 that the non-P sections just do not have but surely would have to have had if they had existed as an independent tradition: the actual burial notice of Jacob. The third and fourth Episodes, where they currently sit, do not establish their own story settings but rely on the first two Episodes for that information. And all of this does not even begin to deal with the more obvious structural unities in the story, namely its overall chiastic structure. Whatever independent traditions may lie behind the present text, the task of getting back to them has clearly been made more difficult by the final hand's brilliant compositional activities.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Abrams, M. H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edn (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999)

Ackerman, James S., 'Joseph, Judah, and Jacob', in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, Volume II* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 85–113

Alonso-Schökel, Luis, and José María Bravo, *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, ed. by Brook W. R. Pearson, trans. by Liliana M. Rosa (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)

Alter, Robert, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 1983)

---, 'Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention', *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 355–68

---, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004)

Amos, Clare, *The Book of Genesis*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2004)

Andersen, Francis I., *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch*, JBL.MS, 14 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970)

Arend, Walter, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer*, *Problemata*, 7 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1933)

Arnold, Bill T., *Genesis*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Arnold, Bill T., and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Auld, A. Graeme, *Kings*, DSB (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1986)

- Avalos, Hector, 'Blindness', *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 193
- Bailey, Lloyd R., *Biblical Perspectives On Death*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979)
- Baldick, Chris, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Bal, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. by Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985)
- Bar-Efrat, Shimon, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. by Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTSup, 70, 2nd edn (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989)
- , 'Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative', *VT*, 30 (1980), 154–73
- Barr, James, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961)
- Barthes, Roland, 'La lutte avec l'ange: Analyse textuelle de Genèse 32. 23-33', in *Analyse structural et exégèse biblique: Essais d'interprétation*, Bibliothèque théologique (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1971), pp. 27–39
- Barton, John, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996)
- Bell, Catherine, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Berlin, Adele, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985)
- , 'Parallelism', *ABD*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 155–62
- Berman, Joshua, 'Identity Politics and the Burial of Jacob (Genesis 50:1-14)', *CBQ*, 68 (2006), 11–31
- Blau, Joshua, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*, LSAWS, 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010)
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (London: T & T Clark, 2011)

- Blum, Erhard, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, WMANT, 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984)
- Boecker, Hans Jochen, 'Anmerkungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament', *ZAW*, 86 (1974), 86–89
- Brockelmann, Carl, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1956)
- Brodie, Thomas L., *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
- Brongers, H. A., 'Bemerkungen zum Gebrauch des Adverbialen *we'attāh* im Alten Testament', *VT*, 15 (1965), 289–99
- Bruckner, James K., *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis*, JSOTSup, 335 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001)
- Brueggemann, Walter, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta. GA: John Knox Press, 1982)
- Bruston, C., 'La Mort et la sépulture de Jacob', *ZAW*, 7 (1887), 202–10
- Budde, Karl, 'Genesis 48,7 und die benachbarten Abschnitte', *ZAW*, 3 (1883), 56–86
- Buth, Randall, 'Word Order in the Verbless Clause: A Generative-Functional Approach', in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, ed. by Cynthia Lynn Miller, LSAWS, 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 79–108
- Calloud, Jean, *Structural Analysis of Narrative*, trans. by Daniel Patte, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Scholars Press; Missoula, MT: Fortress, 1976)
- Cancik, Hubert, and Helmuth Schneider, eds, 'Death', *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, 20 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2002–2010), IV, 129–33
- Carr, David McLain, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996)
- Cassuto, Umberto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I From Adam to Noah*, trans. by Israel Abrahams, 1st English edn (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961)



- , *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch: Eight Lectures*, trans. by Israel Abrahams, 1st English edn (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961)
- Clay, Albert T., ed., *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur: Dated in the Reigns of the Cassite Rulers*, The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts (Philadelphia: Department of Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania, 1906), XIV
- Clines, David J. A., *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup, 10 (Sheffield: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978)
- Clines, David J. A., and John Elwode, eds, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 8 vols (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993)
- Coats, George W., *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, FOTL, 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983)
- , 'Legendary Motifs in the Moses Death Reports.', *CBQ*, 39 (1977), 33–44
- , 'Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50', *JBL*, 93 (1974), 15–21
- , ed., *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, JSOTSup, 35 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985)
- Cogan, Mordechai, and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988)
- Cohn, Robert L., *2 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000)
- Cotter, David W., *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003)
- Couffignal, Robert, "Jacob lutte au Jabboq". *Approches nouvelles de Genèse*, Xxxii, 23-33', *RThom*, 4 (1975), 582–97
- Craigie, Peter C., *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976)
- Crenshaw, James, 'Journey Into Oblivion: A Structural Analysis of Gen. 22:1-19', in *Structuralism: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. by Susan Wittig, Pittsburgh Reprint Series, 3 (Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 99–112
- Culley, R. C., *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narratives*, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976)

- , *Themes and Variations*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992)
- Davidson, A. B., *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902)
- Davidson, Robert, *Genesis 12-50*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)
- Davies, G. Henton, *Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 1967)
- Delitzsch, Franz, *Genesis* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1887)
- Del Olmo Lete, Gregorio, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. by Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 67, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2003)
- Dietrich, Jan, 'Der Tod von eigener Hand im Alten Testament und alten Orient: Eskapistische, aggressive und oblativ Selbsttötungen', in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, *FAT*, 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 177–98
- Dillmann, August, *Die Genesis*, KEH, 4th edn (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882)
- Donner, Herbert, 'Adoption oder Legitimation? Erwägungen zur Adoption im Alten Testament auf dem Hintergrund der altorientalischen Rechte', *OrAnt*, 8 (1969), 87–119
- , *Die literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephsgeschichte*, SHAW.PH, 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976)
- Dozeman, Thomas B., *Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009)
- Driver, S. R., *The Book of Genesis: With Introduction and Notes*, WC (London: Methuen, 1904)
- Dundes, Alan, 'Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 206–18
- Durand, Xavier, 'Le combat de Jacob: Gn 32, 23-33', in *L'ancien Testament: approches et lectures*, ed. by A. Vanel, *Le Point Théologique*, 24 (Paris: Institut Catholique de Paris, 1977), pp. 99–115
- Edwards, Mark W., 'Convention and Individuality in Iliad 1', *HSCP*, 84 (1980), 1–28
- , 'Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene', *Oral Tradition*, 7 (1992), 284–330

---, 'Type-Scenes and Homeric Hospitality', *TAPA*, 105 (1975), 51–72

Exum, J. Cheryl and J. William Whedbee, 'Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic Ad Tragic Visions', in *Beyond Form Criticism*, ed. by Paul R. House, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 272–308

Fenik, Bernard, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Illiad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description*, Hermes, 21 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1968)

Finkelstein, J. J., 'The Laws of Ur-Nammu', *JCS*, 22 (1968), 66–82

Fischer, J. L., 'The Sociopsychological Analysis of Folktales', *CA*, 4 (1963), 235–95

Fokkelman, J. P., *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd edn (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991)

Foley, J. M., *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, IN and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991)

Fretheim, Terence F., *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991)

Friedman, Richard Elliott, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001)

Gainsford, Peter, 'Formal Analysis of Recognition Scenes in the "Odyssey"', *JHS*, 123 (2003), 41–59

Gemser, B., 'Be'eber Hajjardēn : in Jordan's Borderland', *VT*, 2 (1952), 349–55

Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983)

---, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983)

Gevirtz, Stanley, 'Life Spans of Joseph and Enoch and the Parallelism : Sib Atayim-Sib Im Wesib Ah', *JBL*, 96 (1977), 570–71

Gittings, Clare, 'Good Death, Historical Perspectives', *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 210–11

- Gladigow, Burkhard, 'Complexity', in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 483–94
- Goetze, Albrecht, tran., 'The Hittite Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 188–97
- , tran., 'The Laws of Eshnunna', in *ANET*, pp. 161–63
- Goldstein, Jonathan A., *I Maccabees: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary*, AB, 41 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976)
- Golka, W. Friedemann, 'Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?', *CurBR*, 2 (2004), 153–77
- Gordon, Cyrus H., 'The Marriage and Death of Sinuhe', in *Life & Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. by John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987), pp. 43–44
- Gordon, Robert P., 'Simplicity of the Highest Cunning: Narrative Art in the Old Testament', *SBET*, 6 (1988), 69–80
- Gotti, Maurizio, *Investigating Specialized Discourse*, 2nd rev. edn (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008)
- Green, W. Henry, 'The Pentateuchal Question. III. Gen. 37:2-Ex. 12:51', *Hebraica*, 7 (1890), 1–38
- Greifhagen, F. V., *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity*, JSOTSup, 361 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002)
- Greimas, Algirdas Julien, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. by Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983)
- Gunkel, Hermann, *Genesis*, HKAT, 1, 1st edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901)
- Gunn, David M., 'New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *JSOT*, 39 (1987), 65–75
- , "'Threading the Labyrinth": A Response to Albert B. Lord', in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. by Susan Niditch, SemeiaSt (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 19–24

- Hamilton, Victor, *The Book of Genesis*, NICOT, 2 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–1995)
- Hartley, John E., *Genesis*, NIBCOT, 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2000)
- Heinisch, Paul, *Das Buch Genesis: Übersetzt und erklärt*, HSAT, 1 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1930)
- , 'Der Wechsel der Namen Jakob und Israel in der Genesis', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Seelsorge*, 6 (1929), 115–129
- Hobbs, T. R., *2 Kings*, WBC, 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985)
- Hoop, Raymond de, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context*, OTS, 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999)
- , "'Then Israel Bowed Himself ...' (Genesis 47.31)", *JSOT*, 28 (2004), 467–480
- Hupfeld, Hermann, *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (Berlin: Weigandt und Grieben, 1853)
- Hyatt, J. Philip, *Exodus*, NCEB (London: Oliphants, 1971)
- Iser, Wolfgang, *Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1972)
- Jacob, Benno, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, trans. by Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob, aug. edn (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2007)
- Janzen, J. Gerald, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50*, ITC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993)
- Jason, Heda, 'Russian Criticism of the "Finnish School" in Folklore Scholarship', *Norveg*, 14 (1970), 285–94
- Johnson, Timothy, 'Implied Antecedents in Job XI 2b and Proverbs Iii 6a', *VT*, 52 (2002), 278–84
- Kalluveettil, Paul, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, AnBib, 88 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982)
- Kellehear, Allan, 'Good Death', *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 209–10

- Keukens, Karlheinz H., 'Der irreguläre Sterbesegen Isaaks: Bemerkungen zur Interpretation von Genesis 27:1-45.', *BN*, 19 (1982), 43–56
- Klein, Ralph W., *I Chronicles*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006)
- Knoppers, Gary N., *I Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004)
- König, Eduard, *Die Genesis: Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erklärt*, 1st edn (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1919)
- Kramer, S. N., tran., 'Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode', in *ANET*, pp. 159–61
- Kugel, James L., *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981)
- Kuhl, Curt, 'Die "Wiederaufnahme" - Ein literarkritisches Prinzip?', *ZAW*, 64 (1952), 1–11
- Labuschagne, C. J., 'The Life Span of the Patriarchs', in *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament: A Collection of Old Testament Studies, Published on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap and the Retirement of Prof. Dr. M.J. Mulder*, ed. by Adam Simon van der Woude, OTS, 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 121–27
- Lebram, J. C. H., 'Jakob segnet Josephs Söhne: Dartsellungen von Genesis XLVIII in der Überlieferung und bei Rembrandt', in *The Priestly Code and Seven Other Studies*, OTS, 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 145–69
- Lehmann, Manfred R., 'Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law', *BASOR*, 129 (1953), 15–18
- Lenchak, T. A., *Choose Life!: A Rhetorical-critical Investigation of Deuteronomy 28,69-30,20*, AnBib (Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993)
- Leuenberger, Martin, 'Das Problem des vorzeitigen Todes in der israelitischen Religions- und Theologiegeschichte', in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, FAT, 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 151–76
- Leupold, H. C., *Exposition of Genesis* (London: The Wartburg Press, 1942; repr. London: Evangelical Press, 1972)

- Levinson, Stephen C., *Pragmatics*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 'Réponses à quelques questions', *Esprit*, 31 (1963), 631–32
- , 'La Structure et la forme. Réflexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp', *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique appliquée*, 99 (1960), 3–36
- Lohfink, Norbert, 'Und Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jona 4:5)', *BZ*, 5 (1961), 185–203
- Longacre, Robert E., *The Grammar of Discourse*, Topics in Language and Linguistics, 2nd edn (New York: Plenum, 1996)
- , *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989)
- McCarthy, Dennis J., *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973)
- , *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, AnBib, 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963)
- McEvenue, Sean E., *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer*, AnBib, 50 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971)
- McGuire, Errol M., 'The Joseph Story: A Tale of Father and Son', in *Images of Man and God: Old Testament Short Stories in Literary Focus*, ed. by Burke O. Long, BiLiSe (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), pp. 9–25
- Meek, Theophile J., tran., 'The Code of Hammurabi', in *ANET*, pp. 163–80
- , tran., 'The Middle Assyrian Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 180–88
- , tran., 'The Neo-Babylonian Laws', in *ANET*, pp. 197–98
- Mendelsohn, Isaac, 'A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh', *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 180–83
- Mendenhall, George E., 'Covenant', *ABD*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (Yale University Press, 1992), 1179–202
- Merwe, B. J. van der, 'Joseph as Successor of Jacob', in *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Theodoro Christiano Vriezen ... Dedicata* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1966), pp. 221–32

- Merwe, Christo H. J. van der, 'Lexical Meaning in Biblical Hebrew and Cognitive Semantics: A Case Study', *Bib*, 87 (2006), 85–95
- , 'Towards a Principled Working Model For Biblical Hebrew Lexicology', *JNSL*, 30 (2004), 119–37
- Meyer, Eduard, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906)
- Milne, Pamela J., *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative*, BiLiSe (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1988)
- Muilenburg, James, 'Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations.', *VT*, 9 (1959), 347–65
- Muraoka, Takamitsu, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985)
- Nagler, M. N., *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974)
- Neumann-Gorsolke, Ute, "'Alt und lebenssatt...' - Der Tod zur rechten Zeit", in *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski, *FAT*, 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 111–36
- Noth, Martin, *Exodus*, trans. by J. S. Bowden, OTL, 1st Eng. edn. (London: SCM Press, 1962)
- , *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. by Bernhard W. Anderson, Eng. trans. of 1st edn. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972; repr. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981)
- O'Connor, M., 'Semitic Lexicography: European Dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew in the Twentieth Century', in *Semitic Linguistics: The State of the Art at the Turn of the 21st Century*, ed. by Shlomo Izre'el, *IOS*, 20 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 173–212
- Olrik, Axel, 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 129–41
- Olson, Dennis T., *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, OBT (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994)
- Oppenheim, A. L., trans., 'The Mother of Nabonidus', in *ANET*, pp. 560–62
- Pelletier, A., 'L'autorité divine d'après le pentateuque grec', *VT*, 32 (1982), 236–42



- Philo of Alexandria, 'On the Migration of Abraham', in *Philo*, trans. by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, LCL, 10 vols (London: Heinemann, 1932), iv, 123–269
- Pirson, Ron, *The Lord of Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37-50*, JSOTSup, 355 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002)
- Polak, Frank H, 'Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Gen. 1:1-2;3)', in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. by Henning Reventlow and Yair Hoffmann, JSOTSup, 319 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 2–31
- Polzin, Robert, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury, 1980)
- Prince, Gerald, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. edn (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003)
- Procksch, Otto, *Die Genesis: Übersetzt und erklärt*, KAT, 1, 3rd edn (Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1924)
- Propp, Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. by Louis A. Wagner, trans. by Laurence Scott, American Folklore Society of Bibliographical and Special Series, 9, 2nd rev. edn (The American Folklore Society and Indiana University Press, 1968; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990)
- , 'Structure and History in the Study of the Fairy Tale', *Semeia*, trans. by H. T. McElwain, 10 (1978), 57–83
- Propp, William H. C., *Exodus 19-40*, AB, 2a (New York: Doubleday, 2006)
- Provan, Iain W., *1 and 2 Kings*, NIBCOT, 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995)
- Rad, Gerhard von, *Genesis*, trans. by John H. Marks, OTL, rev. edn (London: SCM, 1972)
- Rashi, *Genesis*, trans. by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A. M. Silbermann, Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1929)
- Redford, D. B., *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, VTSup, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1970)
- Rendsburg, Gary A., *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986)

- Rendtorff, Rolf, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. by Margaret Kohl, OTS (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998)
- , *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup, 89 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990)
- Richter, H. F., “‘Auf den Knien eines anderen Gebären’? (zur Deutung von Gen 30,3 und 50,23)”, *ZAW*, 91 (1979), 436–37
- Ricoeur, Paul, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meanings* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976)
- Robinson, J., *The Second Book of Kings*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976)
- Römer, Thomas, ‘How Many Books (Teuchs): Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Deuteronomistic History, or Enneateuch?’, in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?: Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings*, ed. by Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, *Ancient Israel and Its Literature*, 8 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), pp. 25–42
- Rosenthal, Franz, trans., ‘The Sepulchral Inscription of Agbar, Priest of the Moon-God in Nerab’, in *ANET*, p. 661
- Roth, Wolfgang M. W., ‘Structural Interpretations of “Jacob at the Jabbok” Gn 32:22-32’, *BR*, 22 (1977), 51–62
- , ‘The Text Is the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis’, in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. by Martin J. Buss, SemeiaSup (Philadelphia: Fortress; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 103–16
- Ruppert, Lothar, *Die Josephserzählung der Genesis: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Pentateuchquellen*, SANT, 11 (München: Kösel, 1965)
- Samuelson, Norbert M., *The First Seven Days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis*, SFSHJ, 61 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992)
- Sarna, Nahum M., *Genesis*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989)
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Hally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983)
- Savran, George W., *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup, 420 (London: T & T Clark, 2005)

- Scharbert, Josef, *Genesis*, NEchtB, 2 vols (Würzburg: Echter, 1986)
- Schmid, H. H., 'אֶתֵּן', *THAT*, ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1971), 107–10
- Schmidt, Ludwig, *Literarische Studien zur Josephsgeschichte*, BZAW, 167 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986)
- Schmitt, Hans-Christoph, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte: Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik*, BZAW, 154 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980)
- Seebaß, Horst, 'The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process', *JSOT*, 35 (1986), 29–43
- , 'Die Stämmesprüche Gen 49 3-27', *ZAW*, 96 (1984), 333–50
- Segal, M. H., *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship, and Other Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967)
- Segert, Stanislav, 'Parallelism in Ugaritic Poetry', *JAOS*, 103 (1983), 295–306
- Selman, Martin J., 'The Social Environment of the Patriarchs', *TynBul*, 27 (1976), 114–36
- Skinner, John, *Genesis*, ICC, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930)
- , *I & II Kings*, CeB (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1900)
- Snoek, Jan A. M., 'Defining "Rituals"', in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 3–14
- Speiser, E. A., *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964)
- , 'New Kirkuk Documents Relating to Family Laws', in *AASOR*, 10 (ASOR, 1928), pp. 1–73
- Staal, Frits, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen*, 26 (1979), 2–22
- Stade, B., 'Miscellen. 15 "Auf jemandes Knieen gebären"', *ZAW*, 6 (1886), 143–56
- Steiner, Franz, 'Enslavement and the Early Hebrew Lineage System: An Explanation of Genesis 47: 29-31, 48: 1-16', *Man*, 54 (1954), 73–75

- Sternberg, Meir, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987)
- Tadmor, Hayim, Benno Landsberger, and Simo Parpola, 'The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will', *SAAB*, 3 (1989), 3–51
- Taylor, Archer, 'Folklore and the Student of Literature', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 206–18
- Thomas, Matthew A., *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the 'Toledot' Formula*, LHB/OTS, 551 (New York: T & T Clark, 2011)
- Thompson, Thomas L., *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, BZAW, 133 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974)
- Tomashevsky, Boris, 'Thematics', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 61–98
- Tov, Emanuel, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden: Brill, 2005)
- Tucker, Gene M., 'The Legal Background of Genesis 23', *JBL*, 85 (1966), 77–84
- Turner, Laurence A., *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, JSOTSup, 96 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990)
- , *Genesis, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*, 2nd edn (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009)
- Turner, Terence, 'Structure, Process, Form', in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 207–46
- Vanoni, Gottfried, 'שִׁים', *TDOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 89–112
- Van Seters, John, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992)
- Vaux, Roland de, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. by John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961)
- Vawter, Bruce, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Chapman, 1977)

- Vergote, J., *Joseph en Égypte: Genèse chap.37-50 à la lumière des études égyptologiques récentes*, OBL, 3 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959)
- Walsh, Jerome T., *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001)
- Waltke, Bruce K., and Cathi J Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001)
- Weinfeld, Moshe, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)
- , *Sēfer Bērē'sīt*, Hamishah Hummeshei Torah Im Perush Hadash, 1, rev. and corr. edn (Tel Aviv: Gordon, 1975)
- Wenham, Gordon J., *Genesis*, WBC, 2, 2 vols (Dallas: Word Books, 1987–1984)
- Westermann, Claus, *Genesis*, BKAT, I, 3 vols (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974–1982)
- Wette, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de, *Kritik der Israelitischen Geschichte*, Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament, 2 vols (Halle: Schimmelpfennig, 1807)
- Whedbee, J. William, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 1st Fortress Press edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; repr. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002)
- Whybray, Roger Norman, *The Good Life in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002)
- , *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup, 53 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987)
- Williams, James G., 'Number Symbolism and Joseph as Symbol of Completion.', *JBL*, 98 (1979), 86–87
- Wilson, Lindsay, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37-50*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004)
- Wilson, John A., trans., 'The Instruction of the Vizier Ptah-Hotep', in *ANET*, pp. 412–14
- Winn, Peter A., 'Legal Ritual', *Law and Critique*, 2 (1991), 207–32

Wright, Christopher J. H., 'Family', *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 761–69

Yaron, Reuven, *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 2nd rev. edn (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988)